Civil Wars. Violence. Trauma. Intervention

Veranstalter: Center of Excellence „Cultural Foundations of Integration“ at the University of Konstanz
Datum, Ort: 29.11.2008–30.11.2008, Konstanz
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The Center of Excellence „Cultural Foundations of Integration“ at the University of Konstanz held its inaugural event in November 2007 - a symposium entitled, „Civil Wars. Violence. Trauma. Intervention.“ The symposium provided a forum for academics, policy makers, and activists to present and discuss their contributions on the topic, addressing the narratives of individual and collective responses to the traumatizing experiences of violence in civil wars and the questions surrounding effective strategies of intervention and the conditions for sustainable processes of peacebuilding. The vastly polarizing concept of civil war was the central theme of the symposium that gathered scholars from various disciplines and experts with backgrounds in civil war prevention and intervention.

AVISHAI MARGALIT (Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton) was the keynote speaker at the symposium. Margalit said that two pictures of politics shape the idea of political compromise – politics as economics and politics as religion. While everything is subject to compromise in the economic picture of politics, the exact opposite holds true for the religious picture. In times of conflict, it is the religious picture that guides our understanding of politics. He conceived of this religious framework as largely sectarian: A small Manichean vanguard of skilled and dedicated people, claiming monopoly on all values and tending to inflate minor disagreements over beliefs or practices into an impossibility of peaceful coexistence lies at the heart of sectarianism. According to Margalit, sectarianism is characterized by an unrelenting refusal to compromise for the sake of retaining the integrity of that which ought to be kept pure. Referring to sectarianism, Margalit expressed the popular perception of ethnic conflict according to which ethnic groups cannot coexist because they hold irreconcilable disagreements over minor differences of beliefs. Furthermore, there is an innate tendency to favor one's kin, real or imagined, for all social, economic, and political positions of power. Sectorialism, according to Margalit, constitutes the antipode to sectarianism. The pre-state Israel is an example of such a sectorial makeup that reigned supreme over all state functions. Sectorialism entails, in this particular case, a deep commitment to living together based on a strong sense of Jewish solidarity and the Zionist idea of the creation of a national homeland for the Jews. Being thus responsible for its constituency, sectorialism calls for the need to compromise for the sake of keeping a form of shared life. Margalit also referred to Thucydides as the first one to give an account of the conditions of a civil war as a breakdown of an organic political unit of a Hellenic city-state, the polis. According to this classical account, civil war usually takes place in the context of an external war or internationalized conflict. A present day example of this would be the U.S. war against Iraq as the main cause of the civil war there.

By seeking to analyze microlevel patterns of violence in a systematic fashion, STATHIS N. KALYVAS (Yale University) accounted for the nature and the logic of barbaric intimacy of violence in civil wars. The two most prevalent perceptions of violence within a civil war are: the barbaric/brutal violence (the atrocious and excessive nature of violence as the 'deepest and most infernal of violence') and the fratricidal/intimate violence (the intimate dimension of a civil war that targets non-combatant civilians who are not strangers, but have interacted together as neighbors and/or members of the same family). Kalyvas took the Clausewitzian approach to explain the barbaric and intimate character of violence in civil wars. It is the particular form of civil war as 'irregular war' (a guerilla war) that can account for its barbaric nature. An irregular war takes place in the absence of frontlines, but within the divided sovereignty of the two actors, the incumbents and the insurgents. There is little military action between the combatants themselves, while most of the violence is committed against the civilian population. In such a war setting, the logic of 'informational asymmetries' that in-

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volves a switch from 'indiscriminate' toward more 'selective' violence leads to a joint production of violence between the civilians (settling personal accounts through the processes of identification, denunciation, and collaboration) and the armed forces, and thus creates an intimate pattern of violence in which a 'privatization of politics' takes place. Kalyvas focused solely on personal and local grievances in shaping the logic of violence in civil wars. According to him, it is the logic of 'informational asymmetries' alone, and not the politics of the conflict or ideological preferences, that can help us understand the processes of barbarity of civil wars and make sense of their intimate character of violence. He thereby attributed less importance to other aspects, such as the weight of economic conditions and political incentives in post-Cold War intrastate conflicts.

The panel „Gewalt Erinnern und Erzählen" (remembering and telling violence) addressed the ways in which the narratives of war and political violence are committed to memory and (re)fashioned in the literary, historical, and sociological texts from the antiquity to the present.

ULRICH GOTTER (University of Konstanz) spoke of the 'Ästhetik des Schreckens' (aesthetics of terror) as the violently graphic descriptions and narrations of most atrocious events, transgressing the conventional modes of representation. Rendered in excessively gruesome details, such 'writing on the wall' of horrendous scenes and images of extreme brutality constituted the core elements of the narrative of the Roman civil war in oral, biographical, and historiographical accounts. This narrative form was used instrumentally in order to appeal to the popular pathos and thereby pinpoint the dimension of political illegitimacy that the civil war was to have in the Roman popular imagination. On the one hand, its aim was to serve as a stable memory of a collective trauma – a 'Menetekel' (the writing on the wall) of violence – that is kept alive and reformulated as a quasi cautionary tale in order to legitimize the authority of the ruling monarch of the restored Republic; for, as the 'writing on the wall' metaphor purports to demonstrate, an absence of internal authority brings out the most violent form of civil war. On the other hand, Gotter argued that such a narrative of violence was not solely a monopoly of the new order. Another way of reading the narrative posited the presence of a subversive and defiant discourse that widened the divide between the aristocratic victim and the cruel tyrant, the nobility and the monarch, and thus brought into question the role of memory as a medium that was solely at the disposal of the ruling structures. This particular nature of the civil war narrative, according to Gotter, was also crucial in aiding in the process of negative identity formation of the political ruling class of Rome.

ALEIDA ASSMANN (University of Konstanz) spoke of the burden of the past and the problems of its haunting presence in memory. She suggested three possible ways in which one can deal with the painful memories of the past, the best way forward involving some mixture of remembering and forgetting. One can either forget, remember in order not to forget, and/or remember in order to forget. The forgetting has had a therapeutic effect in the instances that reveal patterns of symmetrical violence. Among victims of asymmetrical violence, however, the forgetting as a coping strategy fails. In such situations of extreme violence and suffering, there is the assumption that what can be restored and acknowledged is the historical truth about past wrongs. For this to happen, there is a need for a public confession of guilt or public rendering of remorse. One remembers the past in order not to forget and in order to create a culture of memory so as to prevent the repetition of past violence from happening in the future. If the memory itself is to have an effect of therapeutic and cathartic healing, it has to serve as an instrument of forgetting that allows one to eventually let go of the burden of the past. It is by remembering the story, narrating it, and thus learning about the truth of what happened that it is possible to begin to forget, thus making it possible to put the past behind and to begin the process of healing and recovery.

ALBRECHT KOSCHORKE and ANNA BLANK (University of Konstanz) received criticism for applying a narrative theory-oriented approach to political science. Their claim to an analysis of 'invented traditions' and the 'reconstruction of ethno-identities' by

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using the example of Sarajevo can further be strengthened by noting the degree to which the American bureaucratic model of ascribing fixed racial categories has been transposed to establish a similar model of rigid separation and categorization into three major homogenous ethno-religious groups in Bosnia in the drafting of the present constitution of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina that makes up Annex 4 of the General Framework Agreement, which was crafted at Dayton by a committee of arbitrarily appointed American legal experts. It might be interesting to examine the particular nature and transformation of cultural identity under the Yugoslav multicultural paradigm and the latter ethno-nationalist paradigm in the 1990s. In response to their presentation, one can add that we cannot historically disregard the presence of four major religious groups with their distinct traditions in Bosnia.

On the panel „Traumata von Opfern und Tätern," (the traumas of victims and perpetrators) THOMAS ELBERT (University of Konstanz) used Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET) as a short-term intervention for reduction of post-traumatic stress symptoms in severely traumatized war survivors. Observing hippocampal activity, he was able to trace post-traumatic alterations in cerebral organization. This study may have remarkable implications regarding trauma research, as it seems to be claiming that it is possible to trace a physical/bodily traumatic wound in the form of a traumatic imprint in the particular region of the brain.

BERNHARD GIESEN (University of Konstanz) emphasized the memory of the perpetrators as a collective trauma. The collective trauma of the perpetrators is linked to the crises of cultural self-recognition of social communities: „If a community has to recognize that its members, instead of being heroes, have been perpetrators who violated the cultural premises of their own identity, the reference to the past is indeed traumatic." Employing Freud's understanding of trauma and his mechanism of 'Schuldbearbeitung,' Giesen's approach was a shift in perspective from the one-dimensional, individualistic, and psychosomatic victim-oriented understanding of trauma to render the concept of a collective trauma of the perpetrators possible. At the hand of four 'liminal figures' (the figure of the hero, the victim, the tragic hero, and the perpetrator) as embodied representations of national identity in the public discourse Giesen mapped the sequence of the collective perpetrator trauma of the Germans in the German postwar history. This particular understanding of the trauma sequence refers to an overcoming of painful traumatic experiences, which happens after a crucial period of latency via a series of specific responses: first through denial and repression, after which a process of dissociation and exculpation through transference of guilt onto an outsider culprit takes place, so that the previously ineffable has been transformed into something that can be narrated. In this process of becoming a narrative, the onerous memories of a traumatic experience can be acted out, spoken about, and worked through. The year 1968 revolutionized the legacy of German culpability in the German public discourse. It was the kneeling of the German chancellor Willy Brandt in Warsaw in 1970 that marked a turning point in German postwar history. This singular act of public confession of the collective guilt of the German nation served as an official recognition of a collective responsibility that was carried out on behalf of the entire German people.

The „Justice and Reconciliation" panel featured MICHAEL JOHNSON, the chief prosecutor for the ICTY (International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia) and the head of section of Afghanistan's Attorney General's Office in Kabul at present. Johnson addressed the questions surrounding the nature of accountability for and the prevention of war crimes and addressed the difficult choices that policy-makers face in dealing with conflict intervention. Moreover, he assessed the consequences of the undertaken actions and the forgone alternatives. This was one of the most rhetorically laden talks. Johnson seemed to find accountability for the failures of the ICTY with the principles and pragmatism in strategies of the French troops and the international justice system, whose efforts, according to Johnson, were made difficult by the constraints of the Dayton Peace Accords, the exorbitant time demands, and the lack of financial

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resources at the disposal of the war tribunal.
HANS BLOM (the director of the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation (NIOD) responsible for an 'independent' government-sponsored Srebrenica report, which was published in 2002) provided an introduction to the concluding panel discussion at the symposium. Using the case of the Eastern Bosnian enclave of Srebrenica, which had been declared a United Nations 'Safe Area' in 1993 and was under the mandate of the Dutch UNPROFOR troops (Dutchbat) prior to its fall, he addressed the process of international involvement and the logic of subsequent 'reactive' intervention during the disintegration of former Yugoslavia. He attributed the failures of international intervention to the 'muddling through' approach of the international community, which he described as an 'improvisational trial and error' approach to manage the situation despite the lack of organization. He also called for clearly defined troop mandates in the future. What's more, Blom viewed the events in Srebrenica through the lens of the 'moral hazard dilemma' and argued that Srebrenica was an inevitable, almost as if a pre-meditated outcome on the Bosniak side. Blom went as far as saying that, in spite of its obvious battlefield setbacks, it was the Bosniak side's 'unwillingness to compromise' in peace negotiations and its 'war propaganda' of victimhood in the eyes of the entire international community that allowed the Srebrenica massacre to happen so as to provoke a decisive military intervention. There is no doubt that Blom has prepared ample evidence on behalf of the Dutch government in the lawsuit against the government of the Netherlands and the United Nations by the victims of Srebrenica in the district court of The Hague. Only the future, or Blom, will tell us why the Dutch commander-in-charge, Colonel Ton Karremans, drank a toast with mass murderer Ratko Mladic, whose Serbian troops were wreaking havoc outside. And what about the back-slapping welcome that the Dutchbat gave to the Serbs, as they handed over their uniforms and even actively helped to separate Bosnian men from their families – the very same civilians they were supposed to protect? Or was this all just part of a grand conspiracy by the Bosniak leadership to purposefully sacrifice 8,000 lives for the greater good of military interventions?
The concluding discussion on war intervention and the international community's responsibility was less fruitful and insightful, and rather longwinded. The panel discussant was MATTHIAS RÜB, a former correspondent of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* for South-Eastern Europe. The panel also included political scientists, CHRISTOPHER DAASE (University of Munich) and HUBERT KLEINERT (Fachhochschule für Verwaltung des Landes Hessen), and PETER SCHUMANN, a former UNDP staff member with extensive experience in UN Peacekeeping operations, most recently as the Regional Coordinator and Representative of the UN mission in Southern Sudan. The shortcomings in the scope of the discussion did not allow for the other participants' professional background and expertise to come to the fore.

Most scholars would concur that 'civil war' as a term has become vastly popularized and point to 'internal' or 'intrastate' war as a more precise designation of the term. Only one of the presenters gave, what he considered, a basic definition of a civil war as, „any situation in which an armed combat takes place within the boundaries of a recognized sovereign unit among members and parties that are subject to common authority prior to the beginning of the hostilities." For the purposes of preventing future conflicts and of designing effective strategies of intervention, in the context of the processes of peacekeeping, it has become more important to 'disentangle and open up the black box' of civil war. What gives rise to civil wars? What is the logic behind them? How to escape the inevitable dynamics of conflict via a perpetual circulus vitiosus of violence and counter-violence? These are only a few of the guiding questions that sparked the symposium discussion and provided a kick-off point for launching more substantive projects in the future as part of the Center of Excellence's interdisciplinary initiative.

Overall, it was a very successful and well-organized public symposium thanks to the hard work and dedication of the coordinators Dr. Sabina Ferhadbegovic and Dr. Sven Sappelt along with all the other staff members.

Conference Overview

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Thursday, 29 November 2007

KEY NOTE SPEECH
Avishai Margalit, Hebrew University, Jerusalem / George F. Kennan Professor of International Studies, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton

Friday, 30 November 2007

Welcome and Introduction
Wolfgang Seibel, Professor of Political and Administrative Science, University of Konstanz
The Logic of Violence in Civil War
Stathis N. Kalyvas, Professor of Political Science, University of Yale §
PANEL 1 REMEMBERING AND TELLING VIOLENCE
Severed Hands and Spewed Entrails: The Ugly Face of Roman Civil Wars and their Political Contexts
Ulrich Gotter, Professor of Ancient History, University of Konstanz
How to narrate a civil war
Anna Blank, Doctoral student of Cultural Anthropology, and Albrecht Koschorke, Professor of German Literature and Literary Theory, University of Konstanz
Burden of the past - Burden of memory
Aleida Assmann, Professor of English Literature and Literary Theory, University of Konstanz

PANEL 2 TRAUMATIZED VICTIMS AND OFFENDERS
Organized Violence, Reorganized Brain and Disoriented society
Thomas Elbert, Professor of Clinical Psychology and Neuropsychology, University of Konstanz
Collective Trauma – a cultural-sociological perspective
Bernhard Giesen, Professor of Macrosociology, University of Konstanz
Reconciliation and Justice
Michael Johnson, Head of Section Afghanistan Attorney General's Office, Kabul, and former Chief of Prosecutions for the UN International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia

PANEL DISCUSSION: TO IGNORE OR TO INTERVENE. CIVIL WARS AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY
Introduction: Wolfgang Seibel
Impulse: Hans Blom, Former Director of the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation (NIOD), Amsterdam
Christopher Daase, Professor of International Relations, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich
Hubert Kleinert, Professor of Political Science, University of Applied Sciences for Public Administration in Hesse
Peter Schumann, UN Diplomat and former regional coordinator and representative of the United Nations Mission in Southern Sudan (UNMIS)
Moderator: Matthias Rüb, Journalist and author, Correspondent of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ) in Washington D.C. and former FAZ South Eastern Europe correspondent

Tagungsbericht *Civil Wars. Violence. Trauma. Intervention*. 29.11.2008–30.11.2008, Konstanz, in: H-Soz-Kult 21.04.2008.

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