

The Disasters of Violence, War and Extremism

Veranstalter: Forschungszentrum Historische Geisteswissenschaften der Goethe Universität Frankfurt (Frankfurt Humanities Research Centre); in cooperation with Tel Aviv University

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From 3 to 4 July 2015, the Forschungszentrum Historische Geisteswissenschaften (Frankfurt Humanities Research Centre) held its annual conference. This year it was organized in cooperation with Tel Aviv University at Goethe University Frankfurt. The title of the conference was „The Disasters of Violence, War and Extremism 1813–2015“. It consisted of six sections: (1). „The Meanings of War and Violence“ discussing philosophical and theological aspects, (2) „War Theatres – Theatres of War“ analysing performances in times of war and beyond, (3) „Contesting Memories: World War I“ looking at the Great War’s reverberations in various media, (4) „Shadows of Conflicts and Violence“ extending the vista to the aftermath of war and violence in language, theatre and society, (5) „Violence, Ideology and Statehood“ opening a perspective on social, political and legal formations before and after wars and, finally, (6) „Audio-Visual Presentations of War and Violence“ revealing the sonic impact of war and popular war remediation. Various disciplines took part in these sections and contributed to lively and engaging discussions. The conference, on the one hand, brought together a broad range of subjects discussed by young researchers and renowned experts, as STEFFEN BRUENDEL (Frankfurt am Main), Director of the Research Centre, highlighted. Scholars from various disciplines, such as philosophy, theology, history, theatre, film and media studies, as well as cultural studies, sociology and international peace studies participated. On the other hand, its transdisciplinary setup acknowledged that the analysis of violence and war is a central challenge for the humanities

today, as co-organiser FRANK ESTELMANN (Frankfurt am Main) emphasised. In order to take up the abiding and, coincidentally, timely challenge, the „disasters of violence, war and extremism“ were not reduced to singular events, but discussed in their succession, relations and ruptures.

By setting the timeframe from 1813 to 2015, the conference not only allowed to consider events from the anti-Napoleonic wars to the present „War on Terror“, but also to analyse pre-war periods, war periods and post-war periods. The presentations and discussions can also be divided according to this tripartite structure: Focusing on the pre-war period, several scholars investigated the social, ideological and aesthetic aspects of the preparations, interrogations and subversions of war. MIHRAN DABAG (Bochum) applied an intentionalist approach to illuminate the formation of the „Decisive Generation“ in relation to the politics of genocide. His approach sought to understand genocide through the intellectual formation of a generation. More specifically, he investigated the emergence and negotiation of the concept of „Turan“ among the Young Turks and what this meant for a community such as the Armenians. GALILI SHAHAR (Tel Aviv) investigated the concept of war in German philosophy and literature of the 19th century. Starting from Carl von Clausewitz’ reflections on „absolute war“ inspired by the experience of the Napoleonic war against Prussia to Johann Gottlieb Fichte’s conception of war in relation to „Volk“ and „Vaterlandsliebe“, and to Georg W. F. Hegel’s dialectic understanding of war, Shahar showed that war in German Idealism was designed to be not only an event, but a paradigm of the absolute and immanent. The cultural prominence of these reflections and interpretations, just like those of „Turan“, may be regarded as precursors and ideological context of subsequent wars and violent events. At the same time, Shahar pointed at the subversion of such conceptions, as exhibited in anecdotes and parodies by Heinrich von Kleist. Their literary character allowed ambiguity and enabled the dissemination of dissenting viewpoints. FREDERIKE FELCHT (Frankfurt am Main) and ANJA PELTZER (Mannheim) turned the lens on a dissenting

aesthetic production at the advent of World War I. A close-reading of Holger-Madsen's Film „Lay Down Your Arms“ (1914) revealed a staunch critique of warfare before the Great War had even begun. Not only the early date of this anti-war film is remarkable, but also the way in which the adaptation of Bertha von Suttner's novel portrays war as a socio-cultural epidemic. Yet, the discussion also pointed out the complications such artworks encountered: The pacifist film was misinterpreted and its dissemination was deferred if not inhibited. Thus, dissenting voices face distortion and censorship even at the onset of war.

Wars were analysed in multiple ways and from varying viewpoints. Battlegrounds were subject to investigation, just as internment camps and the home front. As fundamental challenges, wars request new forms of perception, understanding and creation. YARON JEAN (Haifa) sketched out the birth of a new, modern soundscape at the advent of World War I. On the battleground, due to the unprecedented production and spread of new war technologies the importance of the sense of vision was surpassed by the auditory sense. Understanding the new soundscape was fundamental for a differentiation between friend and foe. At the same time the soundscape overstrained the combatants involved not only in complexity but also in volume. The consequence was a disorientation that challenged interaction with objects and subjects. MARKUS WRIEDT (Frankfurt am Main) analysed German protestant sermons in times of war at the battlefield and the home front. These ecclesiastical writings express support of current warfare and the omission of war casualties in their own ranks. The sermons thus exhibit the churches' instrumental role in propagating warfare and the denial of atrocities. While the protestant church clearly functions as a transnational institution, in times of war these connections were momentarily rescinded to serve nationalist aims. AHMET SEN (Frankfurt am Main) revealed a blind spot in current World War I commemorations by presenting the autobiographical works of two Jewish soldiers, one fighting in the Jewish Legion for the allied forces and the other working for the Ottoman

army. He thus introduced the perspectives of Jewish soldiers who fought on different sides, yet shared a sense of diasporic Jewishness, and were caught between ideas of Zionism, diverse national allegiances, and hopes for citizenship. IRIS RACHAMIMOV (Tel Aviv) focused on theatre performances and performative transgressions in World War I internment camps. In numerous camps inmates endeavoured to recreate a sense of home, shelter and dignity. This entailed the performance and appreciation of various female roles in all-male camps. Consequently, the meanings of home, shelter and dignity were redefined and social communities emerged that would have been regarded unacceptable or impossible outside these confines. The lasting impact and value of these experiences is evidenced in the reunions following the end of war. Like Sen, Rachamimov shifted the perspective to hitherto neglected sites, yet furthermore demonstrated the semantic changes this entailed. GAL HERTZ (Tel Aviv / Berlin) discussed the importance of Shakespeare and particularly „Hamlet“ in classic German literature. Hertz' hypothesis was that the German „Geist“ has been defined and continually redefined in relation to Shakespeare and „Hamlet“, in which German intellectuals found the mirror image of their country. This particular relation was especially challenged and belaboured in times of German-English antagonism as during World War I. MARTINA GROSS (Hildesheim) analysed performances of Hugo Ball with the DADA movement in Zurich during World War I. The movement's performances expressed a response to the war and a critique of the society that enabled it. In their creative performances, the artists attempted to depart from traditional forms of representation and meaning. Thereby, they highlighted the rupture the Great War meant also to modern theatre. OMRI BEN-YEHUDA (Tel Aviv) pointed out the remarkable coincidence of a revival of Jewish nationality alongside its sacred language in times of the Great War. A close-reading of Shmuel Yosef Agnon's „Ad Hena“ revealed how the representation of war's dismembered bodies coincide with the engagement with a fractured language. It revealed how this fragmentation entails the revaluation and recreation of a lan-

guage resulting in a renaissance of Hebrew. The wide-ranging and detailed investigations concerning the time of World War I revealed its fundamental challenge to perception and cognition. It also revealed the panoply of responses to war, ranging from witnessing to denial and to the reorganisation, destruction and reconstruction of meaning.

Not only pre-war constellations and the period of World War I, but also post-war times received considerable attention at the conference and were investigated from the viewpoints of various disciplines. The aftermath of war poses particular challenges, as many presentations showed. TILMANN J. RÖDER (Heidelberg) spoke about the concept of transitional justice after periods of war or violence. The history of truth and justice commissions exhibits not only a series of successes, but also of challenges. The application of such commissions must take into account differences of time and place. In other words, truth and justice commissions cannot simply be taken as universal, but have to be applied in respect to particular local societies and traditions. Each time, a process of negotiation will take place in which justice as an institutional entity is in tension and even conflict with justice as a moral demand. SILJA BEHRE (Tel Aviv / Bielefeld) engaged a comparative analysis to illuminate the long shadows of the past in reference to the definition and remembrance of the violence of „1968“. Due to its historical development and social heterogeneity, the „68“ movement can neither be reduced to the year 1968 nor to the expression of violence. Nevertheless, this reduction takes place in memory discourse, even if the definition of violence changed and still changes. The comparison between France and Germany revealed the differing connections that are recognised by the movements themselves and retroactively linked to the movement. In the case of France, „68“ was regarded in the tradition of resistance, while in the case of Germany a connection to the preceding generation's violence was highlighted. INGRID GILCHER-HOLTEY (Bielefeld) extended the perspective on the long shadow of war. A detailed analysis of performances revealed how Erwin Piscator's reflections concerning arts and politics, derived from experi-

ences in World War I, were executed and reshaped by his two students, the actress Judith Malina and the poet and painter Julian Beck. „The Living Theatre“, initially founded in New York in 1947, combined artistic performance with political debate, thereby blurring the boundaries between both and propagating an explicit anarchist and pacifist message. JOCHEN SCHUFF (Frankfurt am Main) opened up a current perspective by focussing on the US American TV series „Homeland“ and its specific way of narrating the „War on Terror“. The „War on Terror“, his analysis revealed, is conducted in this series by traumatised subjects who turn an incisive experience, such as September 11, 2001, into a personal vocation. Thereby, the pursuit of terrorists itself reveals aspects of fanaticism and the borders between American special agents and terrorists are increasingly obfuscated. Traumatic elements structure the content as well as the form of the series. NIKOLAUS MÜLLER-SCHÖLL (Frankfurt am Main) analysed the demonstration of violence in Heiner Müller's play „The Horatian“ as an instance of theatre as „work on evil“. The play, Müller-Schöll argued, stages the positing violence (*setzende Gewalt*) of state regimes. This positing violence distinguishes between legitimate state violence on the one hand and terrorism on the other, while, necessarily, blurring the undecidability of this distinction. Literature and theatre can make us aware of this kind of undecidability and, thus, question the difference between a historically legitimate violence and violence within a specific historical framework that one can oppose to. Concerning the post-war period, then, legal and social measures, generational relations, narrative negotiations, critical interventions as well as staged irritations were brought into perspective.

The conference not only brought together a range of disciplinary perspectives on war, violence and extremism. More importantly it exhibited the necessity to combine these varying perspectives in order to enable a deeper understanding of the complexity of these issues. Only in this way, prehistories of war and violence, the actual events, and their aftermaths can be understood more fully. Last but not least, the conference itself testified to the importance of cooperation, critical dialogue and

reflection among partners such as Israel and Germany. This fact is represented by the co-operation between the Frankfurt Humanities Research Centre and the Minerva Institute for German History, Tel Aviv.

Conference Overview:

Matthias Lutz-Bachmann (Frankfurt am Main): Welcome Address

Steffen Bruendel (Frankfurt am Main) and Frank Estelmann (Frankfurt am Main): Introduction

Section 1: The Meaning of War and Violence
Chair: Steffen Bruendel

Galili Shahar (Tel Aviv): The German War-Machine

Markus Wriedt (Frankfurt am Main): Religious Legitimation of Violence. The Support of War and Violence through Ecclesiastical Loyalty and Militant Nationalism in German Protestantism between 1813 and 1945

Section 2: War Theatres – Theatres of War
Chair: Christian Wiese (Frankfurt am Main)

Iris Rachamimov (Tel Aviv): Female Impersonation in World War I Internment Camps

Martina Groß (Hildesheim): Performing the Escape of Time – Hugo Ball, DADA and World War I

Nikolaus Müller-Schöll (Frankfurt am Main): Wars without Battles – the Theatre of Brecht and Heiner Müller

Section 3: Contesting Memories: World War I
Chair: Christoph Cornelissen (Frankfurt am Main)

Frederike Felcht (Frankfurt am Main) / Anja Peltzer (Mannheim): Epidemic Military Culture: Holger-Madsen's Film „Lay Down Your Arms“ (1914)

Gal Hertz (Tel Aviv / Berlin): „Deutschland ist Hamlet“? Shakespeare and „Deutscher Geist“ in World War I

Ahmet Sen (Frankfurt am Main): Two Sides, One Faith. A Perspective on Jewish Soldiers' Transnational Memories of World War I

Section 4: Shadows of Conflicts and Violence
Chair: Iris Rachamimov (Tel Aviv)

Omri Ben-Yehuda (Tel Aviv): The Renaissance of Hebrew and the European War, the Case of

Agnon

Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey (Bielefeld): Theatre Against War: From Erwin Piscator to the „Living Theatre“

Silja Behre (Bielefeld): Long Shadows of the Past? The Meaning of Violence in the Memory of „1968“ – A German-French Perspective

Section 5: Violence, Ideology and Statehood
Chair: Galili Shahar (Tel Aviv)

Mihran Dabag (Bochum): Gestaltung durch Vernichtung. Generationale Selbstermächtigung und die Politik des Genozids (Forming by Extermination: Generational Self-Empowerment and the Politics of Genocide)

Tilmann J. Röder (Heidelberg): „Transitional Justice“ in Germany, 1945–2015

Section 6: Audio-Visual Presentations of War and Violence

Chair: Frank Estelmann (Frankfurt am Main)

Yaron Jean (Haifa): The Great War and the Birth of Modern Soundscape

Jochen Schuff (Frankfurt am Main): Narrating the „War on Terror“: Trauma and Justification in „Homeland“

Steffen Bruendel / Frank Estelmann: Closing Remarks

Tagungsbericht *The Disasters of Violence, War and Extremism*. 03.07.2015–04.07.2015, Frankfurt am Main, in: H-Soz-Kult 03.08.2015.