

War Veterans and the World after 1945: Social Movements, Cold War Politics, and Decolonization

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Datum, Ort: 07.07.2017–08.07.2017, München

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The international and multi-disciplinary conference focused on the historiographical field of war veterans around the world. War veterans have often formed political lobbies, conducted protest campaigns for pensions and benefits, and kept alive the memory of war. Recent studies have focused on World War I veteran organizations, war invalids, or inter-war veteran politics. As for the world after 1945, scholars have analyzed the role of veterans in various nation-states. The conference aimed to bring together scholars focusing on the period between the end of World War II and the end of the Cold War, advancing towards a global history of veterans' movements and politics in the 20th century.

The first session examined veterans' internationalism after 1945. VÁCLAV ŠMIDRKAL (Prague) focused on the *Fédération Internationale des Résistantes* (FIR). FIR promoted a new type of veteran, the antifascist resistance fighter, in an effort to undermine anticommunist resentments of the Cold War order. However, FIR's allegiance to communism considerably weakened the organization as an attractive alternative to other international veterans' organizations.

ÁNGEL ALCALDE (Munich) provided an overall glance into the history of the *World Veterans Federation* (WVF) from its founding in 1950 through today. WVF's history involved three interrelated and intersecting historical processes: the Cold War, decolonization, and globalization. Until the 1980s, WVF operated under American veterans. Part of WVF's success stemmed from its numerous contacts with the United Nations and non-governmental organizations. The WVF employed a pragmatic approach of not so much maintaining the memory of war and the war dead, but by developing a shared culture of

peace. By the 1960s, the inclusion of newly independent countries led to decreasing world influence and rising bureaucracy. By the 1970s the highly divisive Vietnam War contributed to the diminishing public presence of veterans as a whole.

The second session focused on race and decolonization from North America to South Africa. OLIVIER BURTIN (Princeton) chose to analyze the history of black Legionnaires from within the U.S., the *American Legion*. The *American Legion* represented predominantly the interests of the overwhelmingly white, male middle class of veterans and was insensitive to the civil rights concerns of its non-white members. The *American Legion* leadership frequently referred to racial issues as non-veterans' issues and played a significant part in enforcing conformity and upholding white male privilege.

MATTHIAS VOIGT (Frankfurt am Main) examined the involvement of Native American Vietnam veterans in the Red Power Movement (commonly referred to as the period of Native activism from 1969 through 1978 that ultimately led to a fundamental restructuring of Indian-white relations). The Vietnam War resulted in a widespread mobilization of Native veterans in the struggle against domestic colonialism. Returning veterans frequently felt „a dual sense of betrayal“. They had fought abroad in a questionable conflict and upheld U.S. imperial power, while at the same time the U.S. government at home was seeking to once again forcefully assimilate Native Americans into dominant society. In drawing from a number of case studies, Voigt analyzed how Native veterans pushed hegemonic society for change.

JONATHAN FENNELL (London) examined „South African Veterans and the Institutionalization of Apartheid in South Africa.“ World War II had a transformative impact on South African soldiers, leading to a common national identity among white soldiers – that is those who spoke English and/or Afrikaans. However, the manner in which the home front was managed during the conflict exacerbated racial tensions between white, colored, and black South Africans, laying the foundations of the apartheid state.

GARY FRED BAINES (Grahamstown) re-traced the war memories of South African military veterans in Angola. Militourism, battlefield tourism, and war tourism only bear a passing resemblance to the travel of former veterans to former war zones. Veteran tourism has something in common with personal memory tourism, because a) veterans engage in projects of reconciliation, or b) commemoration; or c), they engage in other culturally and historically enriching activities. The travelogues of two veterans of the South African-Angola War, L.J. Bothman and Paul Morris, encompass something between a safari-like endeavor (in the case of Bothman) and a metaphysical pilgrimage (in the case of Morris).

The third session was entitled „Asia from Empires to Decolonization.“ GRACE HUXFORD (Bristol) analyzed the British experience in the Korean War through three interpretative lenses: forgetting, state power, and cultural exchange in an effort to unpack how veterans deal with their changing relationship with the state. She argued that although British veterans were frequently the object of state mechanisms in their old age and retirement, it was through organizations like the *British-Korean Veterans Associations* (BKVA) and an extensive ‘revisit program’ to South Korea that they were able to reclaim some degree of agency. Apparently, this veteran community was itself constituted and sustained by the wider popular forgetting of their conflict.

DANIEL SCHUMACHER (Essex) focused on the Hong Kong and China branch of the *British Legion* and its campaign between the mid-1970s and mid-1990s of lobbying for pensions and UK passports for Asian ex-service personnel and for their wives and widows. After World War II, the *British Legion* evolved into a powerful ally of its overseas veterans. These veterans found themselves faced with an uphill battle for acknowledgement of and proper compensation for their wartime service, as Britain was gradually disengaging from its imperial possessions. The campaign illustrates how local *Legion* members succeeded in bringing about a major shift towards a more Asia-conscious stance on remembering the past.

SANDRA KESSLER (Mainz) addressed the memory-making of Korean War veterans in South Korea in biographical interviews. Official memory-making is shaped through the South Korean government’s „Revisit Korea Program“ that invites visitors to its country for two reasons: first, to express appreciation for the international support during the war, and second, to highlight its national progress. While this public state initiative shapes public memory, Kessler sought to explore the other side of the story, namely how ordinary veterans reflect on their lives during wartime. In drawing from a cultural anthropological qualitative approach to memory studies – that is an approach that not only analyzes the historical past, but the picture of the historical past that the individual creates in the present – she showed how hierarchy and status influence not only how the veterans interact during the interviews but also what they recall and retell.

The roundtable discussion delved into the vibrant historiography of veteran studies: subfields that define veteran history (such as period, country, and expertise), perspectives (e.g. political, social, cultural and gender), and interrelated fields. The fluid experiences of soldiers, officers, and combatant civilians inhibit a clear-cut definition of „veteran.“ Many veterans share a sense of entitlement and a similar background. The military/ war experience structures soldiers’ lives, as does the transition back into civilian life. During the post-World War II era, the number of veterans in society reached unprecedented proportions, as did the prestige of veterans’ groups in domestic politics.

Session 4 dealt with decolonization and development in Africa and the Middle East. HUGH MCDONNELL (Edinburgh) examined the testimonies of French veterans of the Algerian War (1954-1962) in two leading journals, „Esprit“ and „Les Temps modernes“. The paper foregrounded the question of how contemporaries understood the relationship between violence, imagination, and memory. Together, the testimonies offered a powerful indictment of the rationalization of violence through military socialization and what was perceived as institutional stupidity.

RIINA TURTIO (Geneva) analyzed the effect that former colonial soldiers had on

postcolonial politics in three former French colonies, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, and Upper Volta, from 1958 through 1973. The three countries had very different approaches in dealing with their colonial legacies. Whereas in Upper Volta and Côte d'Ivoire the transfer to the national military was characterized by continuity, the Guinean approach was the most radical as its armed forces were entirely based on French structures and practices, and former colonial soldiers. The integration of former colonial soldiers into newly independent states created significant challenges. African post-colonial governments were uncertain about the loyalties of former colonial soldiers and faced with the difficulty of how to build a national army out of colonial soldiers.

SAMUEL ANDRÉ-BERKOVICI (Paris) considered the evolution of the Algerian veterans' movement and the public policy towards them in the late colonial period from 1945 through 1962. After 1945, administration policies heavily weighted in favor of the *Amitiés Africaines*. However, following the last months of the war of independence, only a residual service of the Department of Veterans Affairs remained active, to supply pensions for Algerian veterans.

ERIC LOB (Florida) dealt with the Trench Builder's Association (TBA, 1979-2013), an Iranian war veterans association that revealed how rural development and other non-coercive tactics impacted the formation of the Iranian state and state-society relations. Iran's conservative elites utilized the TBA; yet this subjected these elites to popular pressure such as rising expectations and demands with regard to education, employment, compensation, benefits, services and exemptions.

OBERT BERNHARD MLAMBO (Cologne) analyzed „veterans, masculinity, and land expropriation in post-independent Zimbabwe.“ Between 2000 and 2008, the veterans of the „War of Independence“ expropriated land and private properties from the white farmers in Zimbabwe. The presentation explored the martial interpretation of the land question and the relationship thereof with the governing of Zimbabwe. It argued that Zimbabwean land confiscations were, in a sense, a continuation of the war of Independence

from colonial Britain (1973–1980) itself. The analysis traced a martial interpretation of the land question to the civilian context in the guise of the Zimbabwe veterans' land movement. In Zimbabwe the decolonization process, conceived through expropriations, has been marred by the manipulation of the symbol of the veteran.

Session 5 focused on the European postwar period and the legacy of fascism. UGO PAVAN DALLA TORRE (Turin) explored the *Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati ed Invalidi di Guerra* (ANMIG). In the post-World War II period, contacts between Italian veterans' associations thrived, encouraging greater dialogue with foreign associations. The presentation sought to understand how Italian former combatants contributed to the creation of international veterans' organizations; their motivations behind this; and what initiatives they embarked on.

STEPHANIE WRIGHT (Sheffield) examined disabled Spanish Civil War veterans under the dictatorship of Francisco Franco within a comparative framework. The comparative framing revealed an unexpected similarity between democratic and non-democratic regimes in their treatment of the wounded of defeated armies. Disability benefits were never used as a way of easing reconciliation in post-war societies. Rather, the withholding of pensions served to preserve wartime divides. Pensions were only ever granted once the political rehabilitation of the losing side had already occurred through other channels. The consistent inability or unwillingness of victorious authorities to regard 'ordinary' disabled veterans of vanquished armies as anything other than perpetrators was as politically convenient as it was financially.

XOSÈ M. NÚÑEZ SEIXAS (Munich) explored veterans from the Eastern front in Franco's Spain (1942-1975). During World War II, the pro-Nazi Franco regime recruited Spanish volunteers for the Blue Division. The 42,000 returning veterans reintegrated into Spanish society and were not subjected to punishment. Blue Division veterans continued to make their careers in Spanish society. The Blue Division served on a relatively quiet front section, distancing the sol-

diers from war crimes; creating the nimbus of „clean“ and „professional“ soldiering that exonerated Blue Division soldiers. The Cold War context required the regime to downplay its attention to a unit that had fought alongside the *Wehrmacht*. Ex-servicemen associations received little public recognition and support. Veterans' associations formed to obtain pensions, food, clothes, health care, and employment for members in need.

The final discussion pointed to the significance of war veterans in the post-1945 historiography. Veterans' associations continue to serve veterans' interests and needs through the procurement of pensions, health care, and employment. They constitute powerful social movements that also seek to memorialize and commemorate their version of the past.

Conference Overview:

Session 1: Veterans' Internationalisms after 1945

Václav ŠMIDRKAL (Prague)

The making and unmaking of the international anti-fascist resistance fighter

Ángel ALCALDE (Munich)

The World Veterans Federation: Cold War politics and globalization

Session 2: Race and Decolonization from North America to South Africa

Olivier BURTIN (Princeton)

Enforcing Conformity: Race in the American Legion, 1940-1960

Matthias VOIGT (Frankfurt)

Fighting for their freedom at home – Native American Vietnam veterans in the Red Power Movement, 1969-1973

Jonathan FENNELL (London)

South African Veterans and the Institutionalization of Apartheid in South Africa

Gary Fred BAINES (Grahamstown)

Retracing Memories of War: South African Military Veterans as Tourists in Angola

Session 3: Asia from Empires to Decolonization

Grace HUXFORD (Bristol)

State Power, Cultural Exchange and the 'Forgotten War': British Veterans of the Korean

War, 1953-2011

Daniel SCHUMACHER (Essex)

Poppies, pensions, passports: the British Legion and transnational civil society action in decolonizing Hong Kong

Sandra KESSLER (Mainz)

„Tell me about your life during the Korean War.“ A Biographical Approach to Korean Veterans' Memories Today

Round table discussion

„War veterans' history and historiography“

Session 4: Decolonization and Development in Africa and the Middle East

Hugh MCDONNELL (Edinburgh)

Imagination and Authority in the Testimonies of French Veterans of the Algerian War of Decolonization (1954-1962)

Riina TURTIO (Geneva)

Colonial soldiers and postcolonial politics in Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire and Upper Volta, 1958-1973

Samuel ANDRÉ-BERKOVICI (Paris)

Algerian veterans associations in the late colonial period in Algeria (1945-1962)

Eric LOB (Florida)

Development, Mobilization, and War in the Islamic Republic of Iran: The Case of the Trench Builders Association (1979-2013)

Obert Bernhard MLAMBO (Cologne)

Veterans, masculinity, and land expropriation in Zimbabwe

Session 5: European Postwar: Disabled Veterans and the Legacy of Fascism

Ugo PAVAN DALLA TORRE (Turin)

The Long „Secondo Dopoguerra“ of the Italian Disabled Ex Servicemen

Stephanie WRIGHT (Sheffield)

Mutilated, but for which Fatherland? Disabled Civil War veterans under the dictatorship of Francisco Franco

Xosé M. NÚÑEZ SEIXAS (LMU Munich)

Inconvenient heroes? War veterans from the Eastern front in Franco's Spain (1942-75)

Final Discussion

Tagungsbericht *War Veterans and the World after 1945: Social Movements, Cold War Politics, and Decolonization*. 07.07.2017–08.07.2017, München, in: H-Soz-Kult 06.11.2017.