

Global War, Global Connections, Global Moments: International Conference about the First World War

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This three-day conference „Global War, Global Connections, Global Moments“, held at the University of Zurich (UZH), explored the First World War in transnational perspective, with an emphasis on marginalised battlefronts, pre- and post-war violence, the role of neutral powers, intelligence, and commemoration. In addition to the panels, the conference featured a young researcher presentation, multiple keynotes, and a roundtable discussion.

The first panel focused on global connections. STEVE MARTI (Ontario) discussed differences in military recruitment in British settler colonies, which actively recruited indigenous troops, and the dominions, where people of colour were largely excluded from military service. FRANCESCA PIANA (Berne) argued that wartime relief campaigns featured a crucial gender component as women activists worked to ‘rebirth’ the world at the dawn of the 20th century. Taking up this humanitarian theme, DANIEL PALMIERI (Berne) spoke on the wartime activities of the International Committee of the Red Cross, including its advocacy of poison gas prohibition.

ADAM OHNESORGE (Zurich) led into the second panel, ‘A Question of Perspective’, with a talk on the little-known plight of civilian prisoners held in Corsica. Building on this fresh approach, YARON JEAN (Sapir College) argued that the war marked a sensory paradigm shift as technological developments increased the speed and sound of war. Moving from soundscapes to timeframes, SARAH LAUFS (Düsseldorf) analysed ruptures and continuities in conceptions of ‘wartime’ among German troops and civilians.

Panel three placed Switzerland in a global context. PETER FLEER (Berne) discussed his archive’s wartime collections, including governmental and corporate records concerning the 1918 general strike and radicalisation of the left. DANIEL MARC SEGESSER (Berne) used the case study of an Austrian-born, Swiss-schooled soldier who served in Turkestan to illustrate the phenomenon of transnational military migration. MICHAEL OLSANSKY (Zurich) highlighted the role of Swiss military observers in diplomacy and knowledge exchange as they reported back on technological and tactical innovations. NINA FLURINA CAPREZ (Fribourg) addressed the effects of the war on one Italian-occupied monastery in South Tyrol and the monks’ efforts to transfer precious artworks to Switzerland.

CHRISTIAN KOLLER (Zurich) launched the fourth panel on migration with a paper on French and British colonial troops in Europe, who were neither universally radicalised nor assimilated by their time in the metropole. MARIA INES TATO (Buenos Aires/ Washington D.C.) discussed the surge of ‘war committees’ and enlistment among European immigrant communities in neutral Argentina. KONSTANTINOS KARATZAS (Athens/ London) argued that post-war Greek culture was greatly shaped by the 1922-1924 influx of refugees from Anatolia. SHUANG WEN (Singapore) discussed YMCA efforts to boost morale among Chinese and Arab war labourers.

A keynote and lively roundtable on early 20th century mass violence closed the first day of presentations. Keynote speaker CHRISTIAN GERLACH (Berne) argued that by analysing violence from 1900-1933 rather than to 1950, new patterns emerge, including the ebbing of colonial violence after 1918 and appearance of ‘areas of continuous mass violence’ in Russia, China, Anatolia, and Mexico. Roundtable contributors ANNETTE BECKER (Paris), HANS-LUKAS KIESER (Zurich/ Newcastle), and MARK JONES (Dublin) broadly praised Gerlach’s fresh approach while questioning his death toll-centred methodology and dismissal of Levant violence as a matter of global importance.

Panel five opened the next morning with a discussion of intelligence networks and secret diplomacy. MATTHEW KOVAC (Oxford) argued that Irish First World War veterans who joined the IRA from 1918-1923 were radicalised by their wartime experiences, especially encounters with other colonised peoples. SAMUEL KRUG (Berlin) highlighted how German attempts to control anti-colonial activist groups faltered amid grassroots efforts to launch new organisations and meet with other European allies. CHRISTIAN STACHELBECK (Potsdam) debunked the 'shadowman' mythology around German intelligence officer Walter Nicolai, positioning him as an unglamorous bureaucrat. JACOCO LORENZINI (Naples) analysed the emergence of transnational networks of European military elites through clubs, patronage, marriages, and diplomatic missions.

SAM KLEIN (St. Andrews) kicked off the next panel on alliance and loyalty with an analysis of British efforts to preserve manpower until the final months of the war. WILLIAM ALLISON (Statesboro) highlighted the sensible diplomacy of Felix Kohl, a U.S. diplomat who advocated 'food and trade' policy toward newly Soviet Russia, while his oblivious superior called for a U.S. invasion. TAKUMA MELBER (Heidelberg) positioned Japan's Bandō camp as a site of cultural exchange between German POWs, their military captors, and local civilians. TOMÁŠ KYKAL (Prague) discussed the fracturing of Czech loyalties between those who fought for the Austro-Hungarian empire and Czechoslovak Legionnaires who insisted on the national right to revolt.

Panel seven addressed post-war commemoration. KARLA VANRAEPENBUSCH (Louvain) demonstrated how the Inter-allied Memorial at Liège is not a 'peace memorial' but an expression of a shared war culture. STEFAN KURZ (Vienna) explored how the 'k.u.k. Heeresmuseum', despite its claims to be a supranational Austro-Hungarian institution, disproportionately favoured contributions from German-speaking areas. GEORGI VERBEECK (Maastricht; Leuven) analysed how Belgian collective memory has diverged in mainstream and Flemish nationalist discourses. Drawing on BBC and France 24

centenary projects, ANNA ISAEVA (Kiev) showed how colonial troops remain exoticised in media representations today. MA TEUSZ MAZZINI (Warsaw) argued that the memory of Polish independence in 1918 is mobilised today by the ruling Law and Justice Party to legitimise their policies.

MAARTJE ABBENHUIS (Auckland) offered the conference's second keynote, on the importance of understanding neutral powers not as mere bystanders, but also as arms dealers, artistic havens, revolutionary hubs, and humanitarian bases.

Panel eight followed this diplomatic theme, with MICHAEL AUWERS (Antwerp) exposing how young nationalists in Belgium's foreign service lobbied to annex Dutch territories at the Paris Peace Conference. In a less sinister vein, ELISABETH MARIE PILLER (Trondheim) argued that neutral organisations like the Commission for Relief in Belgium wielded 'the club of public opinion' to achieve their humanitarian objectives. ANNALISE HIGGINS (Cambridge) discussed the performance of 'openness and neutrality' by interoceanic canals during the war, even as they were less-than-neutrally administered by territorial states.

The final keynote of the day, delivered by HARALD FISCHER-TINÉ (Zurich), tied together humanitarianism and diplomacy by demonstrating how YMCA activities among British and Indian troops acted to soften and mediate cultural tensions, defusing potential mutinies and shoring up the imperial war effort.

ANNETTE BECKER (Paris) picked up this humanitarian theme the following day with her keynote on the war as a 'laboratory' for new modes of violence and its impact on civilians.

Religious diplomacy dominated the discussion of the ninth panel, with CHRISTOPH VALENTIN (Münster) concluding that the Vatican's plan to aid POWs was generally successful while its peace mediation efforts largely missed the mark. JOANNA SIMONOW (Zurich) outlined the nexus of missionaries and journalists who launched a 1918 famine relief campaign in India but were stymied by British colonial administrators. Closing the panel, MARTIN ARNDT (Zagreb)

argued that the 'centre of gravity' for Jewish political thought moved westward, from Berlin to London and ultimately the United States, as a result of the war.

Panel ten tracked the world's uneven transition to peace after the Armistice. JASPER TRAUTSCH (Regensburg) argued that First World War propaganda was crucial in popularising the conception of 'The West', and its affiliated 'Atlantic Community', in modern political thought. LUKASZ MIESZKOWSKI (Jena) discussed collective memory and Polish fears of a 'new Black Death' amid the 1918 Spanish flu epidemic. ÁNGEL AL-CALDE (Shanghai) broke down prevailing dichotomies of brutalisation vs. internationalism among war veterans, showing how international veteran organisations took on not only communist but also liberal, conservative, and fascist forms. MICHAELA OBERREITER (Vienna) discussed how state structures in the short-lived Western Ukrainian People's Republic were influenced by Austrian legal norms.

HANS-LUKAS KIESER (Zurich/ Newcastle) delivered the final keynote of the conference, showing how the 'general' war of 1914 provided the Young Turks an opportunity to settle scores with neighbouring powers after Ottoman losses in the early 1910s. For them, the war in 1914 was yet another war, but the Ottoman world turned out to become an epicentre of violence, especially in Eastern Anatolia and Northern Syria.

With that crucial background, REMZI CAGATAY CAKIRLAR (Leiden) opened the next panel on the 'Global Middle East' with an analysis of French Radical Édouard Herriot's transnational links with the Young Turks and his advocacy of a Franco-Ottoman alliance. JONATHAN KRAUSE (London/ Oxford) examined commonalities between rebellions against conscription and forced labor in French West Africa and Indochina. SIMONA BERHE (Milan) argued that Libyans were active agents in the war, aligning with the Central Powers to resist Italian occupation and broadening their struggle into a wider anti-colonial war against British and French forces. SEBASTIAN WILLERT (Berlin) explored how German-Turkish collaboration on preserving artefacts allowed German museums to main-

tain influence in the Ottoman sphere in light of restrictive antiquities laws.

Building on Willert's talk, the final panel addressed international law and relations. ARNO BARTH (Duisburg) discussed how Western peace planners, believing that 'ethnic unmixing' would pave the way for stable nation-states, built minority protections and population transfers into the post-war settlement. JAN PAJOR (Łódź) revealed the comedy of errors which saw China attempt to join the war no less than three times, purely for a seat at the peace conference, before finally declaring war on Austria-Hungary in 1917. MICHAEL NEIBERG (Carlisle) discussed the United States' similarly bumpy road to war, charting the course from pro-Allied neutrality to anti-German public opinion to increased security concerns.

WILLIAM ALLISON (Statesboro) had the last word, challenging attendees to 'be relevant' and clearly demonstrate how the First World War continues to reverberate in our current political moment.

Conference Overview

Conference Opening by Thomas Schmutz and Gwendal Piégais

Panel I: Global Connections in Wartime

Chair: Konstantinos Karatzas (Research Fellow, Institute of International Economic Relations, Greece; London Center for Interdisciplinary Research)

Martin Deuerlein (University of Tübingen): Global War, International Relations and the Question of Order in an Interdependent World

Steve Marti (Independent Scholar, Ontario, Canada): Dominion Over Empire: Race and Recruitment in Britain's Settler Colonies

Francesca Piana (Swiss National Science Foundation): An Endless War: Gendering International Relief, 1914-1923

Daniel Palmieri (Red Cross Archive, Geneva): Humanitarianism in Global War: The International Committee of the Red Cross in WWI

Young Researcher Presentation: Adam Ohnesorge (University of Zurich): The forgotten civilian prisoners and Swiss peace mission in

Corsica during the Great War

Panel II: A question of perspective – Soundscapes and Time Frames

Yaron Jean (Sapir College, Negev, Israel): The Sounds of the Invisible: Warfare Technology, Obliteration and Global Wars

Sarah Laufs (Heinrich-Heine-University Düsseldorf): Rethinking the Time-Frames of the Great War – Ruptures, Continuities and German Wartime Experiences

Panel III: Global Switzerland

Chair: Adrian Hänni (Distance Learning University of Switzerland)

Peter Fleer (Swiss Federal Archives Berne): Archives and Issues of the First World War – Doing Research in the Swiss Federal Archives

Daniel Marc Segesser (University of Berne): From Bregenz via Turkestan to Solothurn: Military Migration in the First World War in transnational Perspective

Michael Olsansky (MILAK ETH): Between Military Diplomacy and Transnational Military Exchange: Swiss Officers in the Theaters of War of the First World War

Nina Flurina Caprez (University of Fribourg): „When peace was difficult“ – What the history of a monastery tells about World War I and its aftermath

Panel IV: Migration in Wartime

Chair: Jonathan Krause (King's College London; University of Oxford)

Christian Koller (University of Zurich; Sozialarchiv): Intercontinental War Migration of French and British Colonial Troops

Maria Ines Tato (CONICET – University of Buenos Aires – Ravignani Institute / Superior School of War – Faculty of the Army – University of National Defense): Transnational solidarities: Immigrant communities in Argentina facing the Great War

Konstantinos Karatzas (Research Fellow, Institute of International Economic Relations, Greece; London Center for Interdisciplinary Research): The Greek perspective: Migration, Imperial Dreams and Tragedy

Shuang Wen (National University of Singa-

pur): From Moral to Morale: The YMCA and the Chinese-Arab Labourers in WWI

Keynote and Roundtable (History of Violence)

Opening Remarks by Klaus Jonas (Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, UZH)

Keynote I: Christian Gerlach (University of Berne): World War I within a global history of mass violence in the first third of the 20th century

Roundtable. Chair: Philip Dwyer (Director of the Centre for the History of Violence at the University of Newcastle, Australia): Mass Violence in the Beginning of the 20th century with Annette Becker (University of Nanterre, Paris), Christian Gerlach (University of Berne), Hans-Lukas Kieser (University of Newcastle, Australia, and University of Zurich), Mark Jones (University College Dublin, Centre for War Studies)

Panel V: Networks, Intelligence and Secret Diplomacy

Chair: Adrian Hänni (Distance Learning University of Switzerland)

Matthew Kovac (University of Oxford): Traitors to the Crown: British Military Veterans in the IRA, 1918-1923

Samuel Krug (FU Berlin): A global network for a global revolution? Transnational connections of German WWI propaganda

Christian Stachelbeck (Zentrum für Militärgeschichte und Sozialwissenschaften der Bundeswehr): Shadowman or Bureaucrat in uniform – Walter Nicolai and the German military intelligence service in WWI

Jacopo Lorenzini (Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Storici, Naples): Military élites go to war: Italy and Europe

Panel VI: Alliance, Loyalty and Intervention

Chair: Gabriela Frei (University of Oxford)

Sam Klein (University of St. Andrews): Coalition Politics and the Preparations for the Coup de Grâce

William Thomas Allison (Georgia Southern University, USA): With Arms or Food? A Local View on the American Decision to Inter-

vene in North Russia, 1918

Takuma Melber (University of Heidelberg): « Alle Menschen werden Brüder » – German soldiers in Japanese war captivity and the First World War in Far East

Tomáš Kykal (Military History Institute, Prague): Conflict of Conscience and Duty – Czechs in the First World War

Aliaksandr Piahanaŭ (University of Toulouse): A separate peace with Hungary? The Magyar peace feelers at the beginning of WWI (1914-1915)

Panel VII: Transnational commemoration

Chair: Daniel Marc Segesser (University of Berne)

Karla Vanraepenbusch (Université catholique de Louvain): Le Mémorial interallié, un 'mémorial de la paix' qui exprime cependant un refus de démobiliser les esprits)

Stefan Kurz (HGM, University of Vienna): A common museum for a common army beyond the nation? The 'k.u.k. Heeresmuseum' in Vienna and its claim to represent a supra-national Austro-Hungarian view on the First World War

Georgi Verbeeck (Maastricht University and University of Leuven): Remembering the First World War in Belgium – From National to Global Perspectives.

Anna Isaieva (Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Kiev): Visual representation of colonial troops in British and French commemoration projects of the Centennial of the Great War.

Mateusz Mazzini (Polish Academy of Sciences): The 100 years of Today. Poland's WWI commemorations and the meta-memory of independence.

Keynote II: Maartje Abbenhuis (University of Auckland): Global war, global Switzerland: Neutrals at the heart of the First World War – KOL-F-101

Panel VIII: Neutrality and Diplomacy in the Global War

Chair: Philip Dwyer (University of Newcastle, Australia)

Michael Auwers (University of Antwerp):

Away with Neutrality. The 'Colonial' Coup of Belgian Diplomacy during the First World War

Elisabeth Marie Piller (Norwegian University of Science and Technology): The Great War and the Power of Neutrality: The Commission for Relief in Belgium and the Global Public 'Conscience'

Annalise Higgins (Trinity College, Cambridge): The international status of interoceanic canals after the First World War

Keynote III: Harald Fischer-Tiné (ETH Zurich): Cheering up Soldiers, educating Civilians: The transnational Activities of the Indian YMCA during the Great War (1914-1920)

Keynote IV: Annette Becker (Université de Paris Nanterre): The Ordeal of Civilians in a Globalized World

Panel IX: Religion and Diplomacy

Chair: Gleb Albert (University of Zurich)

Christoph Valentin (University of Münster): Between humanitarianism and own political interests. The politics of the Holy See during the First World War

Maik Schmerbauch (University of Frankfurt): The Catholic Church and the German Revolution 1918-1919 in the view of the catholic press

Joanna Simonow (ETH Zurich): Missionary Networks and the Global Response to Famine in India in the Wake of the First World War, c.1918-1925

Martin Arndt (University of Zagreb): Jews between the Frontlines

Panel X: From War to peace

Chair: Steve Marti (Ontario, Canada)

Jasper M. Trautsch (University of Regensburg): The Significance of the First World War for the Conceptual History of the West

Lukasz Mieszkowski (Imre Kertész Kolleg, Jena): A Foreign Lady – The Polish Episode in the influenza pandemic of 1918.

Radhika Singha (Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi): Terminating the war, conserving its trace: India 1918 – 1921.

Ángel Alcalde (Center for the History of Global Development, Shanghai University): War Veterans as transnational actors – Veterans „Internationalisms“ after World War I.

Michaela Oberreiter (University of Vienna): The state structure of the Western Ukrainian People's Republic and the Austrian legal heritage

Keynote V: Hans-Lukas Kieser (University of Newcastle and University of Zurich): „Istanbul in the 1910s: A central hub of diplomacy and global conflict“

Panel XI: The Global Middle East – From Sideshow to Violent Epicenter

Chair: Hans-Lukas Kieser (University of Newcastle and Zurich)

Remzi Cagatay Cakirlar (Leiden University): Édouard Herriot, a vanguard French Radical endorsing the Young Turks' cause at the Dawn of the Great War.

Jonathan Krause (King's College London; University of Oxford): The Global Anticolonial Backlash, 1916-17.

Carl-Leo Graf von Hohenthal (University of Freiburg): Ireland in Palestine? Jews, Arabs, Britons and new perspectives on the fight for the future of Mandate Palestine.

Simona Berhe (University of Milan): From Colonial War to World War – Lybia during the First World War.

Sebastian Willert (TU Berlin): Cultural Imperialism versus Protectionism? On the role of the Deutsch-türkische Denkmalschutz-Kommando during the First World War.

Panel XII: A New Order – International Law and International Relations

Chair: Michael Auwers (University of Antwerpen)

Arno Barth (Duisburg-Essen University): „Nothing should be left to chance“ – Regulatory Models of Western Peace Planning.

Aimé Raoul Sumo Tayo (Université de Yaoundé I, Cameroun): Finir un conflit: les modalités de sortie de guerre en Afrique pendant la Première Guerre Mondiale.

Jan Pajor (University of Lodz): The United

States and China's entry into WWI.

Michael Neiberg (US Army War College): America's Road to War, 1914-1917.

Final Comments and Discussion by William Allison

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