

20 Years after the NATO Intervention in Yugoslavia: Local, Regional and Global Aspects of “Humanitarian Interventions”

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20 years ago, from March until June 1999, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) launched a humanitarian intervention in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), bombing targets all over Serbia, Kosovo and Montenegro as an attempt to stop the war in Kosovo between the Yugoslav forces and the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). Until today, this intervention is being contested and remembered very differently – in some cases even contradictory – by diverse actors and communities. The conference organizers Elisa Satjukow (Leipzig) and Katarina Ristić (Leipzig) invited contributors from various disciplines to reconsider the resulting political and societal consequences from local, regional, and global perspectives. The conference took place in Leipzig in cooperation with the Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe (GWZO), the Heinrich Böll Foundation, the Southeast European Association and the Leibniz ScienceCampus „Eastern Europe - Global Area“.

A broad range of topics was discussed but there were two main themes emerging over the two days of the conference. The first dealt primarily with the moral dilemma of humanitarian military interventions along with the political implications and interpretations of the 1999 NATO intervention in its aftermath, while the second referred to the many layers of collective memory.

The conference started with a public panel discussion that was well attended by a wider audience. Two central aspects of the NATO intervention discourse were discussed. One addressed the efforts of local Human Rights Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to establish fact-based intervention narratives that challenge prevalent narratives of victim-

ization and liberation. SOFIA TODOROVIĆ (Belgrade) outlined these two narratives in reference to Serbia (victimisation) and Kosovo (liberation). NORA AHMETAJ (Prishtina) stressed that the goal of coming to terms with the violent past cannot be achieved by NGOs alone, when support from politicians and academia is lacking. The other central theme was the dilemma of who joined and supported the military intervention. The decisions of Western countries in general, and Germany in particular, were considered. This aspect was discussed by STEFAN TROEBST (Leipzig) who argued that the scientific historical debate focuses on the justifiability of the intervention rather than its causes. In his contributions, WINFRIED NACHTWEI (Berlin) recalled specific debates within the German Green Party and its controversial role within the German government at the time. The four speakers more or less agreed that the intervention was necessary to end the violent conflict and that there had not been a non-military solution under the given circumstances.

The following conference was structured in six thematic panels. The first two panels were focusing on security and foreign policy topics. The subsequent panels presented contributions from various disciplines in the humanities with a focus on memory studies.

The speakers in the first panel discussed the foreign policy aspects of the NATO intervention, its wider consequences for the global political order and, more specifically, for the foreign policies of geopolitical players like Russia and the European Union (EU). All three agreed that the intervention was legitimate (albeit illegal) despite the large number of civilian casualties. In the first presentation, THORSTEN GROMES (Frankfurt am Main) argued that the 1999 NATO intervention in Yugoslavia was a turning point in the global history of humanitarian military interventions as it initiated an upward trend in the statistics of humanitarian interventions as a response to violent conflicts since the Second World War. He showed that this intervention stands out for two reasons: first, it received vast public international attention, and second, it is the last humanitarian military intervention that has

been considered illegal, as it was not authorized by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). TEONA GELASHVILI (Batumi) discussed Russia's role as one of the UNSC members who opposed the 1999 NATO intervention and compared it to the circumstances of the 2018 Russian intervention in South Ossetia. In doing so, she showed that both Russia's arguments against the NATO intervention („neo-colonist violation of international law“) and for its own intervention in South-Ossetia („responsibility to protect civilians in South Ossetia“) are biased and inconsistent, which, in her view, also showcases the vulnerability of international law. Focusing on the question of international recognition of new states, MICHAEL ERIC LAMBERT (Fontainebleau) argued that Kosovo has become the main reference to legitimize new states in the EU, which also influences more recent Russian foreign policies in the Black Sea Region as well as regarding the Donbas conflict.

The second panel presented three very different disciplinary perspectives concerning the legitimacy of the NATO intervention while focusing on regional consequences. AVDYLKADËR MUÇAJ and SHEFKI SHTËRBANI (Prizren) examined several legal aspects of the intervention and the Kosovan independence. Starting from Kosovo's legal status in socialist Yugoslavia, the paper demonstrated why both the intervention and the declaration of independence can be considered to be in accordance with the objectives and principles of international law. As a reaction to the ethnic cleansing that occurred in 1998/99, the UNSC defined the situation in Kosovo as a human catastrophe and as a threat to peace. WERNER DISTLER (Marburg) presented securitization theory as a specific method to analyze state-building discourses by politicians and other political actors in post-conflict situations. His main argument was that repetitive references to the threat or promise of interventions permeated the state-building and consolidation processes in Kosovo and Serbia. The understanding of these references as securitization speech acts, helps to sharpen our understanding of communicative strategies in pre-conflict and post-conflict situations. The third paper re-

flected upon a different and often overlooked form of international intervention in the region of former Yugoslavia. Using Macedonia as a case study, the ethnologist ANDREW GRAAN (Helsinki) observed the frequency of Western diplomats being quoted in public communication commenting on internal politics.

In the third panel, three examples of media discourses from countries outside of Yugoslavia were discussed: Croatia and its conflictual relationship with Serbia; China as one of the UNSC members vetoing the intervention; and Germany as a nation with its own history of mass atrocity crimes. Based on a discourse analysis of Croatian newspapers, VLADIMIR FILIPOVIĆ (Zagreb) showed how the 1999 NATO intervention was perceived in Croatia by the general public and the Croatian government. He asserted, Croatian citizens supported the intervention broadly. Moreover, Serbia's role in the conflict was used in Croatian nationalists' dominant war narrative of a victimized Croatia and critical voices were very limited. The government's opinion, however, was more reserved and multilayered, as it had to balance foreign relations towards Western countries with maintaining its popularity with local voters. China became involved in the conflict when the Chinese embassy in Belgrade was hit by NATO bombs on May 7, 1999, injuring twenty and killing three journalists. This led to large anti-Western and anti-NATO demonstrations in China, mainly by students. YUGUANG ZHOU (Munich) analyzed articles about the intervention in the official Chinese newspaper People's Daily. He showed that the prevailing discourse was based on simplifying ethnic essentialisms, portraying the Yugoslavs as calm, brave, patriotic, peace-loving, and united, and the Albanians as extremists, and separatists. These patterns stressed the recurring theme of a „story of shared victimhood“: China and Serbia both suffering at the hand of „American imperialism“. BERNHARD STAHL (Passau) also used discourse analysis in order to find patterns in German public discourses concerning mass atrocities in other countries, based on the thesis that there had been a general silencing of such topics. By analyzing references to twelve spe-

cific cases of mass atrocities since 1990 in parliamentary debates, the media, and what he calls „norm entrepreneurs“ (e. g. the church), he showed that Kosovo appeared to be a special case. The fact that the German parliament supported the first active combat involvement of the German forces since the Second World War contributed to the increase in references, compared to other cases.

The fourth panel discussed national memorial discourses particularly with regard to the NATO intervention in Serbia, showing three different dimensions: health, militarization, and the politicization of human loss. AS-TREJA PEJOVIĆ (Budapest) presented socio-anthropological findings on the role of depleted uranium from nuclear weapons used by the NATO, and discussed the ongoing national memory discourse as an example of the politicized everyday life in Serbia. She investigated the critical moment when the Serbian state used the narrative of a causality between the depleted uranium and the cancer rate among the Serbian population to its advantage. Here, the occurrence of cancer functions as physical proof of the Serbian victimhood narrative. The second paper introduced an example of remembering a military operation that supports the prevailing David-versus-Goliath-narrative in Serbia. DANILO ŠARENAC (Belgrade) described how on March 27, 1999, an F-117 United States Army spy plane was successfully shot down. The plane had been designed in the 1970s and was regarded as a symbol of US superiority as it was „almost invisible“. It was a unique case in history that a plane of this type was shot down. Šarenac concluded that until today, the downing of this plane is important in creating a narrative about the Kosovo war serving tropes like the „Serbian wit“. JELENA JOVANOVIĆ (Belgrade) presented a study on the collective memory of an important battle in the Kosovo war (Battle of Košare) between the Yugoslav Army and the KLA. It took place between April and June 1999, during the time of the NATO intervention. The study showed that after almost a decade of silence, in 2013, the memory of this war event had moved from the realm of individual and concerned groups to the domain of political and collective mem-

ory. Since this shift, there has been an increase in newspaper articles and film productions about the battle. These can be seen in the context of more nationalist politics as some of the publications are supported or even presented by government actors. As a more general conclusion, this example shows how political changes function as vectors of collective memory.

Following the fourth panel, Jaume Castan Pinos (Odense) presented his new book, in which he claims that the Kosovo intervention case serves „as a pretext, as a legitimation, and as an inspiration“ for regional or ethnic groups that strive for independence in other parts of the world.

The fifth panel addressed the question of remembering the NATO bombing and the Kosovo war in Serbia as well as the relations between official and individual memory narratives. ORLI FRIDMAN (Belgrade) presented an interview-based study from 2013, inquiring into individual memories of the 1999 NATO bombing in Belgrade and analyzing how they fit the collective memory. As a result, she found that the respondents partly challenged the dominant narrative of victimization. Reoccurring themes in these individual narrations are fear, confusion, contradictory memory of everyday routine, and the good times. It was especially interesting that many people noted during the interviews that they had not made a connection between the bombing and the war in Kosovo in their own reflections at the time. GEERT LUTEJIN (Amsterdam) considered Serbian memory narratives as reflected in the concept of transitional justice. He concluded that the war crimes trials rendered by the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia had not had the impact for the Serbian political elite in addressing questions of political responsibility for crimes committed in the name of the Serbian nation. Instead, a master narrative of Serbian victimhood has prevailed. ELISA SATJUKOW (Leipzig) analyzed the development of the official annual commemoration events of the 1999 NATO bombing in Serbia over the last two decades. She showed that, in correlation with political developments, the role that the commemorations play in society has gone through three different phases: (1)

the creation of March 24 as the „Day of Remembrance of NATO Aggression“ with the birth of the David-versus-Goliath-narrative; (2) a paradigm shift following the democratic change in 2000 with small-scale official commemorations like wreath-laying, and (3) a new political shift as the Vučić government came into power in 2013 with a strong nationalist renaissance which adopted the NATO bombing into a new Kosovo myth.

The sixth and last panel turned to artistic responses to the NATO intervention, questioning how the Serbian collective memory of 1999 is being communicated not only within the Serbian society but also to outgroups such as foreign tourists in the cities of Belgrade and Novi Sad. SONJA JANKOV (Belgrade) examined bridges that were destroyed by the NATO bombings as *lieux de mémoire*. She analyzed artistic approaches to the three Danube bridges of Novi Sad which were all destroyed in 1999. In describing past, contemporary, and upcoming art projects, she showed how the bridges became various symbols (victimhood, unity, Europeanism) of the identity of the city's inhabitants. SOPHIA KLUGE (Weimar) probed into the interface between individual and official memory by doing ethnographic research on guided touristic tours in Belgrade. Her thesis is that tour guides act as a broker between official narratives and their own constructed memories, in two ways: either to confirm or, in rare cases, contest the official narrative with missing facts, filling the void with personal memories. NEVENA DAKOVIĆ (Belgrade) presented a study of two Serbian films (documentary „Dubina 2“, 2016, and fictional feature film „Teret“, 2018) that deal with the same historic event: a massacre in Kosovo, committed by Serbs. The mass graves were discovered in Batajnica near Belgrade in 2001. In her conclusion, both films can be regarded as „trauma films“, exploring the trauma from the perspective of the victims but also showing the suffering and trauma of the perpetrators.

Through a variety of disciplinary approaches and topics, many significant aspects of reflecting on dealing with the past in general and on remembering and discussing humanitarian interventions were presented.

However, some participants remarked on the scarcity of contributions from Kosovo and the overrepresentation of Serbian perspectives in the conference program. The organizers acknowledged this deficiency and explained that despite their efforts, there was no increase in applications from Kosovar scholars. Further, a more clear-cut conference question or perhaps a more articulated clustering of the panels would have helped providing more fruitful discussions throughout the conference. In the CfP, the conference organizers had taken the „diversity of interpretations on the global, regional and local scales [...] and the relevance of the 1999 military intervention for domestic and international politics [...] as a point of departure, asking about the cultural, political and historical meaning of the NATO intervention [...]“. Despite the topic breadth, one can say that the conference was successful in bringing these diverse aspects together and thus creating a vivid conversation across various disciplines.

In the final wrap-up discussion, the interest in an ongoing interdisciplinary exchange on the topic of humanitarian interventions led to the idea to form an „Interventions Studies Network“, connecting researchers and activists, providing information about upcoming publications, conferences etc., but also as an opportunity to start a more institutionalized network with further workshops following particular questions on (humanitarian military) interventions. As a first step, the conference papers presented on this occasion will be published in an edited volume.

Conference overview:

Roundtable discussion

20 Years NATO Intervention in Yugoslavia – Considerations, Experiences, Controversies

Nora Ahmetaj (Centre for Research, Documentation and Publication, Prishtina), Winfried Nachtwei (German Green Party, Berlin), Sofia Todorović (Balkan Investigative Network Hub, Belgrade) and Stefan Troebst (GWZO)

Chair: Simon Ilse (Heinrich Böll Foundation)

Conference

Katarina Ristić / Elisa Satjukow (Leipzig University): Welcome note and introduction

Panel 1: The NATO Intervention in Global Perspective

Chair: Stephan Kaschner (GESI, Leipzig University) / Comment: Matthias Middell (GESI, Leipzig University)

Thorsten Gromes (Peace Research Institute, Frankfurt am Main): Kosovo in comparison: NATO's intervention and other humanitarian military interventions after World War II

Teona Gelashvili (Constitutional Court of Georgia, Batumi): Consequences of the NATO intervention in Yugoslavia: A case of Georgia

Michael Eric Lambert (INSEAD Campus, Fontainebleau): Political consequences of Kosovo's recognition by the „West“ and effects on Russia's foreign policy in Eastern Europe

Panel 2: Regional Consequences of the NATO Intervention

Chair: Dietmar Müller (GWZO) / Comment: Stefan Troebst (GWZO)

Avdylkadër Muçaj / Shefki Shtërbani (University of Prizren): Reflections on the 20th anniversary of the NATO Humanitarian Intervention in Kosovo and its consequences: A perspective from Kosovo

Werner Distler (University of Marburg): „Securitized statebuilding“ as a legacy of the NATO interventions in Yugoslavia

Andrew Graan (University of Helsinki): Toward a theory of informal international intervention: on diplomatic speech and the performativity of public communication in post-conflict Macedonia

Panel 3: Media Representations of the NATO Intervention

Chair: Klara Muhle (University of Jena) / Comment: Katarina Ristić (GESI, Leipzig University)

Vladimir Filipović / Ana Radović Kapor (Libertas International University of Zagreb): „Finally they realized who is Milošević“. Croatian views of the 1999 NATO intervention

Yuguan Zhou (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München): Chinese newspaper People's Daily's reporting on the 1999 NATO

bombing of Yugoslavia

Robin Hering / Bernhard Stahl (University of Passau): From Kosovo rush to mass atrocities' hush? German discourses in historical perspective

Panel 4: Fitting the Intervention in National Memory

Chair: Arno Trültzsch (GESI, Leipzig University) / Comment: Nenad Stefanov (Humboldt- Universität zu Berlin)

Astreja Pejović (Central European University Budapest): Social life of depleted uranium: legacies of the NATO intervention in Serbia

Danilo Šarenac (Institute for Contemporary History, Belgrade): Downing of the F-117 on 27 March 1999. Military improvisations and the Serbian war narrative

Jelena Jovanović (Humanitarian Law Center, Belgrade): Serbian collective memory of the Battle of Košare in 1999 – from silence to the main symbol of heroism and pride

Jaume Castan Pinos (University of Southern Denmark): Kosovo and the Collateral Effects of Humanitarian Intervention (Routledge Borderlands Studies), London 2019 (book launch)

Panel 5: Remembering the Intervention in Serbia

Chair: Kathleen Zeidler (GWZO) / Comment: Wolfgang Höpken (Leipzig University)

Orli Fridman (Faculty of Media and Communications & School of International Training, Belgrade): Memories of the 1999 NATO bombing in Belgrade

Geert Lutejin (University of Amsterdam): The 1999 NATO bombing between Serbian contexts

Elisa Satjukow (Leipzig University): Like a phoenix from NATO's ashes. The commemoration of the 1999 NATO bombing in Serbia, 1999–2019

Panel 6: Artistic Responses to the NATO Intervention

Chair: Elisa Satjukow (Leipzig University) / Comment: Beáta Hock (GWZO)

Sonja Jankov (University of Arts Belgrade):

Bridges of Novi Sad in arts projects 1991–2021

Sophia Kluge (Bauhaus-Universität Weimar):
„Bombed buildings“ as landmarks in Belgrade – the collective memory of the NATO intervention in Serbia imparted through touristic tours

Nevena Daković (University of Belgrade):
„Cinematic“ criminalization paradigm: Serbia 1999

Concluding discussion

Tagungsbericht *20 Years after the NATO Intervention in Yugoslavia: Local, Regional and Global Aspects of “Humanitarian Interventions“*.
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