

Individual Experience and Emotions in Times of Violence

Comparative Essays based on the Perspective of the Individual: Friends
and Foes, Heroes, or 'No Man's Land'?

von *Jonas Seyppel**

The thesis of the 'No Man's Land of Violence: Extreme Wars in the 20th Century' is that experiencing violence is a "no man's land" of meaning. First and foremost, experience of war includes emotions as for example fear. For engaged parties violence is just frightening and horrible. Thereby, the authors examine three major questions: What are practices of violence? How does violence occur? In times of violence what is the space for manoeuvre for individuals in a hierarchy? The book is sponsored by the Max Planck Institute of History.

The book is based on a collection of articles. Two scholars from the US, three scholars each from the UK and Germany as well as one scholar from South Africa contributed to this book. From a comparative perspective, they investigate cases from Third Reich Germany, Europe, India, Northern Ireland, South Africa and the Balkans. Substantial issues are factors for violence, soldiers among others.

According to the editors, the 'traditional' perspective is focused on military strategies, tactics and operations. 'No Man's

Land of Violence' contrasts this perspective with the experience of individuals of and in war. Be it terrorism, civil war or international war - the essays in this book treat extreme forms of violence. Thereby, it tries to define the demarcation lines between everyday life and violence.

Alan Kramer's essay (Trinity College in Dublin) "The War of Atrocities: Murderous Scares and Extreme Combat" investigates three questions: has violence no other goal than itself because it is deprived of all strategic function? Or is there political or economic rationality and through that sense in violence? Do cultural factors generate violence? These three questions are researched at the case of German military violence in 1914. Mr. Kramer researches and teaches human behavior in wars and the First World War.

"Endkampf 1918 and 1945: German Nationalism, Annihilation, and Self-Destruction" is the title of Michael Geyer's essay (University of Chicago). In fact, the last year of WWII was the most lethal year of the whole war with casualties falling never below 400,000 every

* Jonas Seyppel M.A. ist Doktorand und arbeitet zur Zeit als Management Consultant bei Communications and Network Consulting in New York.

month from July 1944 on. Samuel N. Harper Professor Geyer is specialized in the history of the two world wars.

University of York's Richard Bessel wrote an essay about "The War to End All Wars: The Shock of Violence in 1945 and Its Aftermath in Germany". He describes the violence to which the German population was exposed during the last months of the war. Richard Bessel is professor in twentieth century history

Joanna Bourke, Birkbeck College, "The Killing Frenzy: Wartime Narratives of Enemy Action". This essay describes the experience of an American soldier during WWII on Okinawa Island while in contact with the enemy. Bourkes' field of research is the history of modern warfare.

Alf Lüdtke from the University of Erfurt points out that a work-like treatment of their undertakings allowed professional soldiers to normalize their actions and behavior: "War as Work: Aspects of Soldering in Twentieth-Century Wars". Lüdtke is professor of historical anthropology and specialized in work and working people history.

Gyanendra Pandey from Emory University focuses in her essay "Woman's Place in the No Man's Land of Violence: The Indian Subcontinent, 1947-48" on sexual violence against women. There are two basic assumptions in the article: Violence is overwhelmingly male. Sexual violence against women is often used as a strategy, tactic, policy, plan, tool and practice. Examples are the Vietnam War or the Serbian war against Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. A cruel example is the happenings in villages in India and Pakistan in 1947 where women were slaughtered in almost festive sessions. During this time of mass hysteria on both sides - Muslims on the one and Hindus and Sikhs on the other -, as a knowledge-

able colonial administrator put it, there was a total reversal of the ordinary moral values. There was no punishment for anybody, no international war crime tribunal or truth commission to deal with the happenings. There was not even active involvement of any state institution in the dealing with the cruelties. Until this is done "the necessary steps towards combating the increasingly destructive character of collective sanctioned violence" will not be taken. Pandey is Asa Griggs Candler Professor and specialized in gender aspects of violence.

Janet Cherry from the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa outlines in her essay "Armed Struggle and Sectarian Violence: South Africa and Northern Ireland Compared" contexts of violence at the example of security force repression in both countries, communities of violence in each of the countries, morality and accountability of armed groups in this type of warfare, as well as amnesty, accountability and acknowledgement after transitions. Her thesis is that also "low intensity" conflicts are wars and as terrible as media hyped conflicts. Therefore they are worth more attention and help. Cherry researches human rights, democracy, social history, gender and development.

The "new wars theory" defines wars to be increasingly internal, ethnically and religiously driven. They are characterized by a diffused actor constellation, without any borderlines between civilians and combatants, as well as increasingly marked by massacres instead of battles. Wolfgang Höpken from the University of Leipzig contrasts this theory in "Performing Violence: Soldiers, Paramilitaries and Civilians in the Twentieth-Century Balkan Wars" with the notion that the most striking wars in the last decades are still classical wars, turning wars increasingly into "markets

of violence" (Georg Elwert's "Gewaltmärkte"). Höpken illustrates his thesis with the Balkan Wars 1912-13 and in the early nineties: the Yugoslavian war in the early nineties is still far more historical in its causes rather than a case of globalized warfare. Höpken is professor for Eastern and Southeastern European history.

Bernd Weisbrod, Göttingen University: "Religious Languages of Violence: Some Reflections on the Reading of Extremes". Extreme forms of violence in the 20th century are often related to religion. "Shock and Awe" is not only the name of a US military strategy in the Third Gulf War. It is also a key to understand how warfare in the 20th century might relate to the resurgence of religious

fundamentalism. Religiously motivated violence can be a religious experience, even if it might be immoral, politically counterproductive or even regarded as irreligious by some. Weisbrod is professor for political culture.

The mixture of articles covers a wide range of conflicts. It covers WWI and II as well as civil wars and transnational conflicts. The book provides insights to and views on aspects of violence from an original perspective. In terms of personal feelings and experiences, the individual point of view often finds no reflection in International Relations theory. For this reason, this perspective can be refreshing for those used to analyze strategic aspects of violence and conflicts only.

Das Buch:

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Redaktion: René Denzer / Internet: www.agips.org / Email: AR@agips.org

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