



Emotions and Violence in 20th Century Europe. Historical Perspectives on Violence Prevention and Peace Education. Dagmar Ellerbrock, Max Planck Institute for Human Development Berlin; Silke Fehleemann, Goethe-University Frankfurt am Main; Klaus Weinhauser, Bielefeld University, 26.06.2013-28.06.2013.

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Published on H-Soz-u-Kult (September, 2013)

Emotions and Violence in 20th Century Europe. Historical Perspectives on Violence Prevention and Peace Education

Hosted at the “Max-Planck-Institut für Bildungsforschung” (Max Planck Institute for Human Development) in Berlin, this interdisciplinary conference on emotions and violence might have been a milestone in the research of understanding violence through the analysis of emotions. The program aimed at combining the two research fields in order to examine how emotions are linked to the dynamics of violent actions and peace building. It integrated the analysis of emotions into methodological debates based on case studies of violent (re-)actions and peace building and discussed emotions as a concept helpful for the historical analysis of violence. It was a further intention of the conference to examine what role emotions play in the memory of violence and in medial representations of violence.

The research center on the history of emotions at the Max Planck Institute was the ideal host institution as it seeks to analyze emotions and their norms and variability in history with an interdisciplinary approach. The Minerva research focus on violence and emotions, led by the conference organizer Dagmar Ellerbrock, deals specifically with the relationship between acts of violence and feelings and in which ways this relationship changes throughout modern history.

The conference, which received substantial attention from the media (RBB, Tagesspiegel, Deutschlandfunk), was attended by a wide variety of researchers and scientists from the fields of history, sociology, criminology, psychology, political science and media studies from the

US and Europe. Within global contexts, its transnational, comparative perspective exceeded the current state of research and made a big step in the direction of demonstrating emotions as a relevant field in historical science.

The first keynote speaker SUSANNE KARSTEDT (Leeds), argued that “we need to step out of the shadow of the Holocaust”, an extreme event, and examine contemporary mass atrocities with other eyes, especially in terms of the role emotions play within them. Nevertheless, she objected that the Holocaust can help shed new light on today’s atrocities and vice versa. Using examples from Srebrenica and Rwanda, she demonstrated that emotions are vital for being violent, as perpetrators always feel emotional dominance, whereas victims have low confidence and are very passive. Yet, according to Karstedt, violence is not easy and while emotions are functional they lack motivational features. She made her talk relevant to peace building by stating that the build-up of emotions prior to the start of atrocities makes resistance possible and should motivate peace keepers to start interventions early. Criticism was raised only against her methodology of using (partly staged) photographs to analyze emotions.

In the first panel on theories, methods and concepts for emotions and violence, CHRISTIAN VON SCHEVE (Berlin) reflected on collective emotions, which he believes to be dependent on structural, symbolic as well as cognitive factors and at the root of collective violence. For ROLAND WEIERSTALL (Konstanz) emotions are es-

pecially important in predicting behavior. He pointed out the interesting fact that having had negative experiences of violence does not mean that one wants to avoid them in the future which led him to his main point: “ordinary people can turn cruel under certain conditions”. Violence does not necessarily have to be connected with negative emotions but it is also possible for people to experience positive feelings such as joy, pleasure and enthusiasm when doing violence. Therefore, Weierstall noted, it is vital to have an interdisciplinary approach for sustainable strategies in peace building as psychologists are only responsible for therapy. He concluded by saying that aggression is a facet of human behavior that is determined by emotional and motivational systems and is linked to the dichotomy of approach and avoidance.

The second keynote lecture by THOMAS SCHEFF (Santa Barbara) which was transmitted via Skype, was concerned with the relationship between shame and violence and the constructive and social effects that negative emotions can have on people. He argued that unacknowledged shame, shame that is not put into words, can lead either to withdrawal or to anger and aggression. For him, shame is a social system which can lead to emotional loops, meaning: shame can lead to more shame about being ashamed or anger which can lead to more anger about being angry or back to shame. Relating his talk to peacebuilding, he proposed that the police should be trained in acknowledging shame to break the pattern of the shame loop and therefore prevent violence.

ROGER PETERSEN (Cambridge) took a more practical approach in his talk on emotions and ethnic violence. Based on his personal experience in former Yugoslavia, he developed an approach to strategically use emotions to predict conflict behavior. His theory revolves around seven different (negative) emotions that usually determine behavior, i.e. anger and fear, which cause violence. Translating his research into political strategy as well as into political science, he stressed that emotions can, and should be, seen as a resource for political action, in the same manner as weapons and money and should be treated accordingly as they can help in supporting political developments as well as peacebuilding processes.

The second panel focused on different forms of (collective) violence with DAGMAR ELLERBROCK (Berlin) starting with a talk on violent group formation in the late Weimar Republic. While she first gave some basic information about emotional analysis, she was most concerned with the relationship between collective shame and collective violence. Using eyewitness accounts from

street fights in the late Weimar Republic she analyzed the emotions the young men were said to have and arrived at the conclusion that emotions have an enormous impact on group formation. She also pointed out the positive factors of doing violence in groups, namely a feeling of togetherness and community. By committing crimes, the young men were able to transform shame, anger and hurt confidence into emotional energy. Collective emotions are therefore vital in understanding and preventing violence. Similarly, THOMAS KÜHNE (Worcester) argued that violence can have stabilizing effects on groups. Using examples from the Gestapo, Wehrmacht and the SA, he said that extremely brutal attacks on Jews cannot simply be explained by obedience or Anti-Semitism but rather by a sense of group pleasure and group belonging, concluding that social unity and emotional integrity depend on each other.

Although the Milgram Experiment (ME) and the Stanford Prison Experiment (SPE) have been discussed in sociological and psychological contexts quite a number of times, often just using them as proof for human obedience in violence, KLAUS WEINHAEUER (Bielefeld) added new aspects to the matter. For him, emotions such as unacknowledged shame – often embedded into gendered group dynamics – play a substantial role in these experiments. This historical perspective on shame-driven practices of “doing groups” can add a new layer of interpretation to the interdisciplinary debate. ALLEN FELDMAN (New York) took a more philosophical approach on violence and combined Greek mythology with concepts of rehabilitation in the context of the South African Truth commission. He examined the role of emotional concepts in transitional justice and how different emotional practices form moral communities.

In the third panel, all speakers emphasized emotions as a key element in understanding the relationship between media and violence. BARBARA KRAHÉ (Potsdam) focused on desensitization through usage of violent media. In her own experiments, she found out that even small sequences of violent media increase the participants’ acceptance of aggression, leading to a higher potential of them acting aggressively. She agreed that violence is difficult but that positive emotions can build a bridge to it. While ANNE SCHMIDT (Berlin) analyzed atrocity propaganda during World War I and how media coverage and rules of representation (“Zeigbarkeit-sregeln”) changed in the course of the war, JULIANE BRAUER (Berlin) stated that when using empathy in historical learning about the Holocaust, one has to be careful. Due to one’s own experience and disposition, empa-

thy can also lead to identifying more with the perpetrator rather than the victim.

The last day provided new perspectives on victims. It focused on emotional regimes in World War I and was concerned with answering questions of how emotions are used in politics, how emotions can act as a mode in shaping memory and how they can connect past, present and future. MICHAEL ROPER (Colchester) focused on the psychological legacy of WWI for children. Using interviews conducted with veteran's children, he analyzed the transfer of violence through generations and found that the fathers' experience during the war had a definite impact on the children, experiencing their fathers' memory of violence either by experiencing their own violent or even pacifist behavior.

Using mostly literary theory and the current psychological understanding of phenomena such as grief, CAROL ACTON (Waterloo) dealt with private emotions in wartime letters and diaries, while also comparing them to public emotions of the time. In her research, she found that these letters and diaries create a world outside of the violence of the war while being a form of therapy for the soldiers. SILKE FEHLEMANN (Frankfurt am Main) also looked at the aftermath of World War I but focused on parental grief for their sons. She argued that fathers were not received as mourners and mothers were partly made responsible for the defeat. So public mourning of bereaved parents was not represented in public. This led to male dominated commemoration practices and to mothers becoming mainly silent mourners. In the 1920s, the National Socialists used these emotions to integrate mothers into future oriented symbolic politics. NILS LÖFFELBEIN (Frankfurt am Main) spoke about a similar subject. He analyzed representations of disabled bodies in Nazi Germany. He argued that the National Socialists tried to monopolize the memory culture of the "Great War" and glorified disabled soldiers in this context. They were represented as war heroes, as the "first citizens of the nation" in order to establish the Nazi's own emotional regime in the country and to mobilize the German society for the next war.

While this conference was vital in providing the necessary fundamental research, a workshop is planned for October to transfer the results and methods discussed on this symposium to the fields of violence prevention and peace education. Funded by the "Deutsche Stiftung Friedensforschung" (German Foundation for Peace Research), the conference will be an excellent starting point for this difficult but extremely relevant field of research

which offers high potential for development. Many of the talks during the conference reflected the will and hope to work towards an informed understanding of violence prevention and peace education and will hopefully help with transferring theoretical knowledge into more practical settings in fall.

Conference Overview:

Ute Frevert (Berlin): Welcome Address

Dagmar Ellerbrock (Berlin): Opening Remarks

Keynote Lecture:

Susanne Karstedt (Leeds): The Emotional Dynamics of Mass Atrocities

Panel I: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Emotions and Violence: Theories, Methods and Concepts

Chair: Holger Nehring (Sheffield)

Christian von Scheve (Berlin): Collective Emotions and Violence: A Sociological Perspective

Roland Weierstall (Konstanz): Emotions as a Motor for Aggressive Behavior: A Psychological Perspective

Keynote Lecture:

Thomas Scheff (Santa Barbara): Alienation and Hidden Shame: Social-Emotional Causes of Conflict

Keynote Lecture:

Roger Petersen (Cambridge, MA): Emotions and Ethnic Violence

Panel II: Emotional Dynamics of Collective Violence: War, Civil War, Ethnic Violence and Transitional

Chair: Christoph Cornelißen (Frankfurt am Main)

Dagmar Ellerbrock (Berlin): Fun, Excitement and Arrogance – Violent Group Formation in the Late Weimar Republic

Thomas Kühne (Worcester, MA): Belonging through Atrocity: Bystanders of the Holocaust and their Emotions

Klaus Weinbauer (Bielefeld): Overcoming Dichotomies. The Milgram Experiment (ME) and the Stanford Prison Experiment (SPE) of the 1960/70s

Allen Feldman (New York): Between the Saying and the Said: Antiphonal Witnessing, and Affect at the South African Truth Commission

Panel III: Media, Emotions and Violence: Insights for Prevention

Chair: Bernd Weisbrod (Göttingen)

Anne Schmidt (Berlin): Atrocity Propaganda – the Pros and Cons: A German Debate on World War I

Juliane Brauer (Berlin): Empathy and Historical Learning about the Holocaust. Silver Bullet or Dead End?

Barbara Krahe (Potsdam): Emotional Desensitization to Violence: The Impact of Violent Media Use

Panel IV: Emotional Regimes in Wartimes and Aftermath: The First World War

Chair: Susanne Karstedt

Carol Acton (Waterloo, ON): Love and Death in the Great War: Private Emotion and Public Scripts

Michael Roper (Colchester): The Psychological Legacy of World War I for Children

Silke Fehleemann (Frankfurt am Main): Violent Death: Parental Grief after World War I in a Gendered Perspective

Nils Löffelbein (Frankfurt am Main): Suffering, Sacrifice and Heroism. Representations of Disabled Soldiers in National Socialism

Round Table

Chair: Dagmar Ellerbrock

Jack Barbalet (Hong Kong); Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (Bielefeld); Susanne Karstedt; Holger Nehring; Roger Petersen; Michael Roper; Bernd Weisbrod

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

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Citation: Natalia Marcelo. Review of , *Emotions and Violence in 20th Century Europe. Historical Perspectives on Violence Prevention and Peace Education*. H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. September, 2013.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=40001>

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