

International Conference at Centre Marc Bloch Berlin

7th and 8th of December 2017, Berlin

CALL FOR PAPERS

**From Colonial War to the War on Terror? Perspectives on Government
Struggles against Distant "Monsters" in the 20th Century**

Since the beginning of 2013, the research group "Urban Spaces of Violence" (Urbane Gewalträume) of the joint project "Saisir l'Europe" has dealt with questions relating to issues of violence practices, effects, and dynamics in an interdisciplinary perspective. Special attention has been paid to the interrelationship of these issues to various spatial configurations. For the members of the research group, the spatial conditions of the genesis of violence serve as common reference points, along with issues concerning the role of the statehood(s) and form(s) of an organized regulation of violence within a given territory. Taking this one step further, the international conference organized within the framework of the research group will turn to the present controversial and politically highly relevant topic of the war against terrorism. The conference will take place in Berlin on 7th and 8th of December 2017.

The primary goal of this interdisciplinary conference is to provide fresh impetus for reflection on "new wars" (Mary Kaldor, Herfried Münkler), "new risk wars" (Ulrich Beck), and, in particular, the war on terrorism. In stressing the new quality of the respective phenomena, too much attention has been paid to differences with the so-called "old wars" usually understood as military confrontations between nation-states. Conversely, parallels to conceptually more elusive colonial wars of the 20th century have been largely overlooked. As a consequence, the question of what is actually new about the "new wars" and the war on terrorism continues to lack a satisfactory answer to this day.

Methodologically, the contributions should draw on recent approaches to terrorism research that do not understand terrorism only as a unilateral act of violence, but as a form of interaction and communication – specifically, in the sense of a flagrant public attack on the monopoly on violence of a state, which the state also recognizes and evaluates as such. This opens up the viewpoint inter alia that while state actors are unable to definitively influence the perception and classification of an attack, they make every effort to delimit and if necessary to shift the definitional domains concerning the terms of criminality, terrorism, and war. It will be important to stress that this is not a recent phenomenon, but already

represented a means of securing power in many colonies.

The main approaches for a historical comparison between the war on terrorism and the colonial war arise primarily because of the relative blurriness of both phenomena. The one and the other state-organized exercise and threat of violence often results in a state of permanent alert with fluid boundaries between war and peace. In both cases, state actors have mostly sidestepped guidelines concerning the use of force like international conventions. Not just the means, but also the targets of state violence have generally been imprecisely sketched out. Finally, the political and moral disqualification of the enemy as the "ultimate evil" observable in both cases has always corresponded to a strategy of self-exaltation and self-empowerment for the sake of military action.

Given the relatively large latitude of state actors in the actual formation of a colonial or anti-terrorism war, the question first arises as to what extent spatial ideas and practices of spatial control (particularly in the areas of the military, police, and judiciary) determine the respective conduct of war beyond a state's own borders or in so-called "state remote areas." Which forms of knowledge and techniques have been implemented to influence the political and social life within a foreign territory and correspondingly (through violence) a particular state's vested interests? To what extent could they be enforced and what resistance did they meet inside and outside of the state power structure?

Some colonial wars and wars on terrorism have developed significant transfer effects, even away from their immediate theaters. In many instances, politically motivated violence – be it in the interest of anti-colonialism or terrorism – has been understood as a questioning of global legitimacy and order patterns. As a result, attacks in one location could entail in the short to medium-term reactions in others with sometimes completely different political and social constellations, giving way to unexpected (but in part also intended) domino effects of enormous geographical significance. It is worth considering the role played here by state actors, in particular through the attempt to influence media and propaganda offensives. Furthermore, the current importance of international observers relating to the form, excesses, and legitimacy of global conflicts raises questions about the historical origins and the development of this phenomenon. Occasionally, colonial powers could even be influenced in their warfare by assumptions about how they were being judged by third parties.

We are asking for "densely described" case studies that focus on practices of state actors who have sought to exercise control over a certain territory in the name of a colonial war or a war on terrorism. Applicants are invited to send a one-page abstract in English, German or French by *May 31, 2017* to the e-mail address below. Travel and accommodation costs will be covered for those whose abstracts are evaluated positively.

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