

**Doing Anthropology in Wartime and War Zones.
Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Anthropology in Wartime**

Symposium veranstaltet vom Collaborative Research Center on War Experiences
und dem Ludwig-Uhland-Institut für Empirische Kulturwissenschaft,
beide an der Eberhard Karl Universität in Tübingen
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Despite the explosion of work in the history of anthropology over the last several decades, one area that still remains relatively unexplored is the connection between war and the anthropological disciplines. The recent conference, „Doing Anthropology in Wartime and War Zones“, held in Tübingen, Germany on Dec. 7-9, 2006, addressed this topic and raised questions that will undoubtedly energize future research. The symposium was jointly sponsored by the Collaborative Research Center on War Experiences, as well as the Ludwig-Uhland-Institut für Empirische Kulturwissenschaft, both at the Eberhard Karl University in Tübingen. The central theme of the Tübingen Research Center is the experience of the First World War, and many – but not all – of the papers at the symposium dealt with this subject. The conference was truly international and interdisciplinary, with scholars from Germany, Austria, Russia, and the United States offering contributions from the fields of history, anthropology, art history, and science studies. Participants met in the beautiful „Fürstenzimmer“ (Princes' room) of the old Tübingen castle.

In his opening comments, *Reinhard Johler* (Tübingen) observed that the First World War has generally been ignored in the history of the anthropological disciplines, even though the War created a series of new spaces – discursive, material, ideological – in which anthropologists worked. Johler laid out the questions that framed the conference's deliberations. What were the connections between war and anthropology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? How did wartime contexts affect the discipline and its institutional development? Did colonial practices and discourses in anthropology continue during wartime, or cease? How did work in the new spaces and places created by war, such as prisoner-of-war camps, occupied territories, and battle zones, influence anthropology after the conflict?

Questions of continuity and discontinuity quickly came to the fore in a series of papers that examined anthropological traditions in different countries during World War I. *Henrika Kuklick* (University of Pennsylvania) argued that the Great War sustained prewar trends in British anthropology. British anthropologists generally denied a racial basis for the conflict and saw POW camps as flawed venues for anthropometric studies. W.H.R. Rivers's analyses of the war's shell shock victims had elements that were compatible with the emerging school of functionalist social anthropology, but the general trajectory of British anthropology was not altered by the conflict. *Marina Mogilner* (Ab Imperio/Kazan State University) also provided a narrative of continuity in her paper on Russian military anthropology during World War I. Both before and during the war, the Russian War Ministry encouraged graduates of its St. Petersburg Military-Medical Academy to produce dissertations in physical anthropology that served imperial purposes, particularly by addressing the question of nationality within the Russian army. The turning point came not in 1914 but with the Russian civil war and early Soviet state-building, which reoriented anthropologists toward both traditional ethnography and eugenicist projects. For the German case, however, *Andrew Evans* (SUNY New Paltz) argued for discontinuity, maintaining that World War I facilitated a final break with the liberal and

anti-racist anthropology that had dominated the late nineteenth century. In the atmosphere of total war, German physical anthropologists sought to make their science relevant to the nation and state by applying their disciplinary tools – including concepts of race – to the war effort. The wartime experience and the dislocation of defeat resulted in a more politically instrumentalized and narrowly nationalistic anthropology that paved the way for postwar forays into the „völkisch“ racial science of the 1920s. *Gottfried Korff* (Tübingen) argued that the war also played a central role in the institutionalization of „Volkskunde“ as an independent discipline in Germany after 1918. During the war, the discipline not only presented itself as a critical tool in the formation of a national community, but also aimed to establish itself as a practical science, focusing on soldiers' languages, customs, and superstitions.

Another series of papers revealed a common pattern of anthropological work in various war zones. Anthropologists in vastly different national contexts and periods sought to make their science politically and practically relevant to diverse conflicts. *Christian Promitzer* (University of Graz) demonstrated that from the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 to the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, Serbian and Bulgarian physical anthropologists used studies of POWs and recruits to present biological evidence for competing political claims. Serbian anthropologists in particular argued for a South Slav racial type in order to support a Serbian and Pan-Slavic brand of nation-building. *Irma Kreiten* (Tübingen) showed a similar political process at work in the Caucasus during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century; Russian military officers produced ethnographic knowledge designed to facilitate the subjugation of the area's peoples. *Harold Salomon* (Humboldt University, Berlin) explored the efforts of American anthropologists – Ruth Benedict in particular – to contribute to the war effort in the United States during World War II. Constrained by wartime circumstances, Benedict argued that Japanese culture could be studied „at a distance“, especially through film, in order to answer questions about Japanese behavior. In each of these cases, wartime contexts shaped both methodologies and conclusions, and the activities of anthropologists could not be divorced from the political, military, and administrative circumstances in which they took place.

Another series of papers established that the development of colonial practices and rhetoric accelerated in wartime anthropology. Ethnographic projects centered on the Balkans, in particular, functioned to create an orientalized, colonial space in the Central European imagination. *Diana Reynolds* (Point Loma Nazarene University, San Diego) explained how this dynamic operated in the case of Bosnia, where the Austro-Hungarian empire functioned as a colonial power after the annexation of the region in 1878. Focusing on the reception of Bosnian weaponry in Austria, Reynolds argued that imperial authorities sought to tame the image of the Bosnian warrior by transforming previously threatening Bosnian weapons into souvenirs and decorative objects through the establishment of craft schools and ateliers. *Christian Marchetti* (Tübingen) argued that from the 1880s to the First World War, Austrian ethnographers working in the Balkans consistently conceived of the region as a violent frontier area where the inhabitants respected only military strength. In the case of Montenegro, *Ursula Reber* (University of Vienna) described how Austrian military officers produced ethnographies that emphasized an image of the Montenegrins as warlords, and later, during World War I, as less civilized and strategically inexperienced tribes. In his closing comments, Andre Gingrich classified these ethnographic efforts in the Balkans as forms of „frontier orientalism“ – colonial discourses about the margins of Europe. *Michael Pesek's* (Humboldt University, Berlin) paper on military ethnographies in East Africa showed similarities to the Balkan studies. Colonial travelers and administrators produced ethnographies that were primarily designed to aid would-be conquerors, with a clear emphasis on military applications.

A final group of papers addressed the major anthropological project in Germany and Austria during the First World War: the study of foreign soldiers in POW camps. Physical anthropologists and ethnologists alike were thrilled with the potential of the POW population for anthropological study and viewed their work in the camps as equivalent to work in a laboratory. Several papers examined how the POW camps affected the ways in which scientists gathered data. In her comparative analysis of the Austrian and German ethnographic

projects to record the languages and songs of the POWs, *Monique Scheer* (Tübingen) argued that the camp studies were a decisive moment in the shift toward the gramophone in musical ethnography, since the „laboratory-like“ conditions of the camps made the technology easier to use than it was in the field. For the specialty of physical anthropology, *Margit Berner* (Museum of Natural History, Vienna) located the methodological roots of the POW studies in late-nineteenth-century racial surveys conducted in Germany. A number of the papers pointed out, however, that the camps presented unforeseen difficulties. *Britta Lange* (Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin) showed that the physical anthropologist Egon von Eickstedt struggled to obtain accurate background information from captive soldiers and to collect representative samples of data, leading him to question the very methods of anthropometry.

The camps also produced a vast visual archive of photographs, paintings, drawings, and films. Two papers explored the ways in which such images remained embedded in non-scientific discourses. In his analysis of the ethnographic films made in the camps by the Austrian anthropologist Rudolf Pöch, *Wolfgang Fuhrman* (University of Kassel) argued that these films were heavily influenced by the techniques of the colonial travelogue, which emphasized the picturesque in an effort to contain the exotic. *Margaret Olin* (Art Institute of Chicago) found parallels between anthropology and art history in the visual archive from the camps and analyzed the participation of Jews in the production of images of POWs. Jewish artists took part, she argued, in order to establish Jews as a „people among peoples“ in the multi-ethnic, multi-national setting of the camps, even at the risk of participating in their own racialization.

In the final session, *Andre Gingrich* (University of Vienna) provided a masterful set of closing remarks. He pointed out that there appeared to be stronger continuities in the social and cultural anthropological traditions of the „victors“ in World War I, or at least among those who could claim not to have lost. In the anthropology of the defeated countries, now robbed of their colonial peripheries, ideological and institutional change was more common, as was a „turn inward“ that focused ethnographic energies upon one's own nation (Volkskunde). He further suggested that the papers had demonstrated the importance of colonial rhetoric in wartime anthropology, as well as the significance of domestic political contexts in explaining developments within the anthropological disciplines. In his view, the wartime POW studies often led to methodological and conceptual crisis, particularly because they were an attempt to gain scientific respectability made by a young generation of anthropologists. Much of the work in the camps, he suggested, foreshadowed the racist turn in German anthropology in the 1920s. Overall, the sessions in Tübingen demonstrated that the study of anthropology in wartime is an exciting new area for scholarly inquiry, providing a particularly useful prism through which scholars from disparate fields can view the national and imperial experiences that helped shape twentieth-century Europe.

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