

Storylines and Blackboxes. Constellations in auto/biographical narratives about the experience of violence in the context of the Second World War

International workshop organized by the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies (VWI) together with the Institute of European Ethnology and the Institute of Contemporary History at the University of Vienna, May 22-24, 2014

Call for Papers

Experiences of violence from a range of perspectives constitute an important part of the body of biographical narrative about the period of the Second World War; they have been granted particular attention and reflection in the consideration of the aftermath of National Socialism and its crimes. The significance of these narratives about violence in the context of identity constructions within society, and in particular of those with a national outlook, has long been reflected upon with great differentiation and been a topic in theory construction. The auto/biographical character of many of these narratives, however, has long been largely disregarded – even in the context of the recent novel approaches to the figure of the "surviving witness", its significance and history, and the relationship between contemporary historians and surviving witnesses, which have developed in the face of the shift between communicative and cultural memory.

This workshop sets out from the assumption that recounting experiences from the era of National Socialism and the Second World War is always also part of an individual autobiographical project that keeps changing, intensifying and shifting in the course of a lifetime. Following on from concepts of narratology as well as oral history, this workshop will thus approach narratives of experiences of violence from angles that deal with the significance of this biographical narrative for the individual. Specific autobiographical practices and different performances of biographical narrative shall be the subject of the discussion as well as in particular a questioning of the constellations that make use of historically taught cultural patterns of autobiography in socially differing practices of narrative. There has been little reflection of the cultural resource of auto/biographical narrative told in the first person; this is used in specific situations where individual impulses and motives for narrating an experience of violence conflate with societal instances and interests that question, publish, instrumentalise or even reject or silence that biographical narrative. This is true for survivors' reports of deportation and displacement, of camps, of forced labour, of sexual violence and of wartime internment, but it also applies to the memories of many members of those groups who engaged in violent acts themselves.

The workshop will focus on the historical nature of these constellations and the narratives that have emerged in its context since 1945. It is the aim of the workshop to reformulate and theoretically re-evaluate these questions in an extended and comparative perspective of the European and global aftermath of the Second World War. We will focus on the historical dynamics of this constellation and the context of the emergence of the narratives. It shall have to be addressed who is telling of an experience of violence in which historical and communicative constellation and which biographical situation. This challenge will also be directed at those who initiate, provoke, support such narratives. What is appropriate to tell in which form and at what time in a given society; when is it not or no longer appropriate? What is the relationship between autobiographical narratives on the one hand and constructions

resulting out of the politics of memory with regard to identity, authenticity and (surviving) witnesses on the other?

The workshop will thus concentrate on the narratives told in the aftermath of the history of the Second World War in the mode of auto/biographical narrative and their constellations:

- the global dimension of narratives: A differentiated discussion of narrating the experience of violence during the Second World War demands a comparison of narratives from different local, national, European and non-European provenances, which are nowadays clearly marked by the logic of large, transnational projects.
- the multitude of forms and formats of narratives: The autobiographical narrative of experiences of violence can take various forms of oral, written, pictorial narrative or a combination thereof; these are influenced by specific media landscapes and patterns of complexity reduction.
- the different individual as well as social frames of these narratives, which may be in conflict with each other: politically initiated archival projects, educational or artistic concepts, as well as in the media highly successful TV-formats of interviews with witnesses to history can either concur or clash with individuals' biographical or family-historical ambitions. It is particularly relevant in this context to address gender in the framework of auto/biographical narratives on violence, the contents of the narratives as well as the ability or lack thereof to narrate something and the performances of narratives.

This historically differentiated appraisal of auto/biographical narratives of the experience of violence in the context of the Second World War is to be understood as an intervention: an attempt to drive forward a critical reflection not least of the academic work using these narratives, and also of the communication that takes place with surviving witnesses.

The workshop organizers are inviting suggestions for discussion contributions on the subject of the questions cited above; for contributions that intervene in the existing mindsets and practices and create an awareness for existing logics and routines in order to open these up for new perspectives and reformulations.

The workshop languages will be German and English. The costs for accommodation will be covered by the organizers. The organizers' ability to cover travel costs also is subject to current efforts to raise separate funding.

Please submit your applications in German or in English (including an abstract of the topic of your contribution of at most 3,500 characters as well as a short biography) under the subject line "**Workshop 2014**" by November 30, 2013 to:

cfp@vwi.ac.at

The contributions at the workshop should last no longer than 20 minutes.

A jury appointed by the organizers will make the decision on the acceptance of proposals. You will receive an immediate confirmation of the receipt of your proposal. If you do not receive a confirmation, please send a reminder.

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