

IN THIS ISSUE

In 2020/21 it was first and foremost the Covid pandemic that many experienced as a major turning point; now the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine since 24 February 2022 has added a whole new set of events of existential significance, whose medium- and long-term consequences we can only partly foresee. The title of a book published in the spring of 2022, *Der 11. September 2001 – (k)eine Zeitenwende? (11 September 2001 – A Historical Turning Point?)*, has come to sound like something from a bygone age.¹ The question ›Is this the beginning of a new era?‹ is now posed under altered circumstances,² and a ›historical turning point‹ and the ›end of globalisation‹ are proclaimed in equally adamant fashion.³ An academic – in the best sense of the word – conference on ›New Eras and Epochal Change‹ in April 2022 acquired an unanticipated immediacy. The organising team wrote: ›We have been outrun and perhaps even rendered irrelevant by events.‹⁴ But humanities scholarship also entails a certain scepticism towards hasty diagnoses of the times and proclamations of turning points, as scholars including the Indian-born political scientist Parag Khanna have underscored: ›We should avoid grandiloquent proclamations that seek to encapsulate our times. Such characterisations can only capture the moment that has just passed and are guaranteed to quickly be outdated.‹⁵ Of course even such a ›guarantee‹ that any statements can only be provisional may seem questionable when there are ›unmistakable symptoms of upheaval, of profound rupture‹, as the historian Jörn Leonhard has emphasised. With reference to Reinhart Koselleck, he underscores the fundamentally close link between ›rupture and repetition‹, between the ›singularity of history‹ and its ›recurrence.‹⁶

This sounds at first very abstract and perhaps a little helpless. The experienced historian of Eastern Europe Karl Schlögel openly acknowledged his own disbelief and horror at the war in Ukraine: ›For what we're seeing we have, as they say, no words. [...] Perhaps falling silent, conceding that we cannot face what we are seeing, is the most appropriate response. What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.‹⁷ And yet he has not remained silent and has been very present in the media in recent months. In the context of his decades of research on Eastern European cities and conflict landscapes, he is interested in the intersection of historical experiences and the

1 Andreas H. Apelt/Eckhard Jesse/Evelyna Schmidt (eds), *Der 11. September 2001 – (k)eine Zeitenwende?*, Halle (Saale) 2022.

2 Jörg Häntzschel, Die Welt zerfällt, in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 4 April 2022, p. 9.

3 See for example Jens Jessen, Das Ende der Globalisierung, in: *ZEIT*, 19 May 2022, p. 47.

4 Annual conference of the Leibniz Center for Literary and Cultural Research in Berlin; see <<https://www.hsozkult.de/event/id/event-116537>>.

5 Parag Khanna, Ist eine Weltordnung möglich?, in: *ZEIT*, 11 August 2022, p. 47.

6 Jörn Leonhard, Die Grenzen der Analogien. Der Krieg in der Ukraine als historische Zäsur, in: *Osteuropa* 72 (2022) issue 4-5, pp. 3-12, here pp. 6, 12.

7 Karl Schlögel, Die Ukraine als Kairos. Ordnung im Kopf, Unordnung in der Welt, in: *Osteuropa* 72 (2022) issue 1-3, pp. 7-18, here p. 8.

coining of new terms: ›The topography of the ›century of extremes‹ is being redrawn; over the layer of terror from the 20th century a new layer settles. The history of genocidal ideologies and practices is carried forward, at the level of the present, both archaic and artfully postmodern. [...] There is no returning to a politics of remembrance that ignores recent experience. [...] [S]carcely any concept will remain untouched by recent experience.⁸

This leads us right to the heart of a debate that goes, or should go, far beyond Eastern European research: To what extent is it politically appropriate and epistemologically useful, beyond the understandable moral outrage, to characterise the current mass crimes with terms like ›war of extermination‹ and ›genocide‹? Do neologisms like ›Putler‹ and ›Rashism/Ruscism‹,⁹ which first emerged in Ukraine, help only in the battle for attention, or can they lead to new insights? Some German historians of the Nazi era, such as Ulrich Herbert, are, for good reason, sceptical of attempts to create politically charged analogies between the past and the present.¹⁰ Others, however, including Eastern Europe historian Martin Schulze Wessel, believe there are good grounds to speak in the context of Ukraine of a ›war of extermination‹ and ›genocide‹ and to interpret the reluctance historians have shown thus far as itself part of a specific historical constellation.¹¹ Additionally, there are plausible legal arguments that at least certain sets of events in the war in Ukraine, such as the ›urbicide‹ in Mariupol, ›fulfil the material or objective as well as the mental or subjective elements of genocide‹.¹² And finally, the long-scorned term ›totalitarianism‹ is acquiring new actuality and significance.¹³

Exactly one week before the start of the war in Ukraine, *Michael Wildt* held his farewell lecture at the Humboldt University of Berlin, which we document in the present issue. He was therefore unable to comment on the discussion adumbrated above, but his central question ›What do we mean by the singularity of the Holocaust?‹ nevertheless has many highly relevant implications, particularly concerning the relationship of National Socialist and colonial violence, and regarding attitudes to this today. I believe everyone who took part in this digital lecture (almost 500 people!) found it to be a very special intellectual event – a nuanced, sensitive summary of National Socialist

8 Ibid., p. 13.

9 Arkadiusz Łuba, Putler, Putinna und der Tod. Russlands Ukraine-Krieg in der Karikatur, in: *Osteuropa* 72 (2022) issue 1-3, pp. 277-298, on Putin/Hitler comparisons e.g. pp. 286-289, 293; online seminar ›Rashism/Ruscism – Is Russia Fascist?‹ presented by the Deutsch-Ukrainische Historikerkommission, 23 June 2022, programme available at <<https://www.hsozkult.de/event/id/event-118609>> and the video recording at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fXUZB6RfUpo>>.

10 ›Mit Hitler hat das nichts zu tun‹, in: *taz*, 1 July 2022, pp. 4-5 (interview by Stefan Reinecke with Ulrich Herbert).

11 Martin Schulze Wessel, Faschismus? Genozid? Vernichtungskrieg?, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 25 July 2022, p. 6.

12 According to Otto Luchterhandt, Völkermord in Mariupol'. Russlands Kriegsführung in der Ukraine, in: *Osteuropa* 72 (2022) issue 1-3, pp. 65-85, here p. 65.

13 Annette Vowinckel, Totalitarismus 2.0. Mit Hannah Arendt auf Putins Russland blicken, in: *zeitgeschichte|online*, 2 June 2022, URL: <<https://zeitgeschichte-online.de/themen/totalitarismus-20>>.

and Holocaust scholarship of recent decades, and a forceful plea for debates around the politics of the past to be conducted with greater openness and consideration; presented by a colleague who himself represents and embodies this in his expertise and personality. Our journal is highly indebted to Michael Wildt, who has been a member of our advisory board since its inception in 2003/04, and who is one of those who have contributed the greatest number of original texts. Although it was his farewell lecture at the Humboldt University, he will continue to be involved with *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History*, and we look forward to many more rewarding discussions with him.

The composition of the ›open‹ issues, without any overarching theme, is always a combination of serendipity and the selection of articles that work well together. It thus so happens that the present issue includes three contributions relating to the National Socialist era and scholarship on the period: *Henning Borggräfe*, *Lukas Hennies* and *Christoph Rass* draw on examples from the history and aftermath of the Nazi persecutions to demonstrate the methodological utility of geographic information systems (GIS) in historical scholarship. Dissociating themselves from the somewhat overblown claims to innovation sometimes made in the digital humanities, they consider also the epistemological limits of this set of tools. *Michaela Scharf* demonstrates how family films functioned as ›visual constructions of the private sphere‹ and a ›form of self-assertion‹ through the prism of the fascinating amateur films of Ellen Illich, who suffered anti-Jewish persecution at the hands of the Nazis. The geographical focus here is on Austria (before and after the ›annexation‹ of 1938), as it is also in the article by *Anton Holzer* on postcards from Mauthausen, the site of the largest Austrian concentration camp. As the 1956 postcard on the cover indicates, the tourist images were dominated by the ›summer escape‹ on the Danube. The Nazi history was only glimpsed at, but did leave some traces.

Another focus that comes up repeatedly in this issue and which is important for the discussion of contemporary history in general may be summed up as ›difference competence‹ (*Differenzkompetenz*), as Benno Gammerl described it in our special issue on ›Masculinities‹ (ZF 3/2021). In this issue, *Frank Biess* looks at the genesis and reception of Günter Wallraff's 1985 bestseller *Ganz unten*. Adopting the role of the Turkish man ›Ali‹, Wallraff exposed structures of xenophobia, labour exploitation and routine violence. Biess infers from the hitherto little discussed German-Turkish criticism of the book that not only was scant attention paid to migrant voices in the West Germany of the 1980s, but that there already existed at the time interesting positions that could be profitably applied to current debates around racism and anti-racism, about ›cultural appropriation‹¹⁴ and its limits. Related to this is the general, latterly hotly contested question of who may ›speak‹ politically and academically about and for whom – whether experiences of marginalisation can/should be articulated and their history studied only by those directly ›affected‹, or whether they may be communicated and criticised intersubjectively. *Rüdiger Graf* calls for greater recognition of the difference and plurality of

14 See also, more recently, Jens Balzer, *Ethik der Appropriation*, Berlin 2022.

divergent ways of perceiving the world in an essay on autism and neurodiversity which anticipates our forthcoming special issue on Disability History (ZF 2/2022). But he also insists that scholarship requires ›critical reflection of one's own position and the positions of others in communicative processes‹ beyond a ›standpoint epistemology‹ that treats one's own perspective as absolute.¹⁵

It is not easy to apply the postulates of discourse ethics at a time when war and mass crimes are so fundamentally compromising the foundations of international order, of social coexistence and of academic discourse. And so the editorial team, editors and advisory board of this journal are also discussing how previously held assumptions regarding the relevance of certain subjects are shifting, what new perspectives need to be developed, and what seemingly well-founded lessons about the past need to be reevaluated in the light (or now, perhaps, in the shadow) of the present. We warmly invite readers to let us know what they think and send us suggestions. The preoccupation both with military history, armament and the violence of war, and with the history of pacifism, arms control and means of peaceful conflict settlement, is sure to take on greater significance (once again), as will contemporary history research on energy, resources and climate, on inflation and social inequality, on logistics and commodity flows – to name just a few of the issues of particular urgency right now. As appropriate as it is to revitalise Eastern European research here in Germany after its decline following the end of the Cold War and to overcome its long-standing fixation on Russia,¹⁶ it is equally important to lastingly establish in historical scholarship a spectrum that is as broad as possible in terms of methodology, subject matter and geography, also beyond the immediate crisis management efforts. Historical Research derives its legitimacy not only from the demands of the present; it can and must also further a broadening of perspectives, an openness to new questions and answers, a disruption of hegemonial premises. This will not end any wars, but it will sharpen awareness of possible courses of action in very different historical constellations – and thus perhaps also, at least indirectly, empower the political imagination.

An article in this issue by *Marco Swiniartzki* continues previous research on the social history of pop culture and on gender history with a study on the New Wave of British Heavy Metal, while an article by *Hans Kühner* reports on the development of

15 See also, for example, »jenseits der Disziplin und nicht disziplinär«, in: *taz*, 6 August 2022, pp. 34-35 (interview by Doris Akrap with literary scholar Sigrid Weigel). Here Weigel says: ›It becomes very problematic if we come to a point where only women are permitted to do work on women, Blacks on Blacks, Jews on Jews; in other words, when a person's origin is what determines the legitimacy of speech or the truth of assertions.‹

16 See the article published several years ago by Manfred Sapper, Mehr Expertise wagen. Russland- und Osteuropakompetenz in Deutschland, in: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 67 (2017) issue 21-22, pp. 33-38; recently, for example, Fabian Baumann, Von Krieg zu Krieg. Historische Ukraineforschung seit 2014, in: *Osteuropa* 72 (2022) issue 1-3, pp. 309-318. Schulze Wessel, Faschismus? (fn 11), calls for a ›decolonisation of our perceptions of Eastern Europe‹ as a counterbalance to Putin's intended ›recolonisation‹. Similarly, Botakoz Kassymbekova and Annette Werberger argue for a ›diversification of Eastern European Studies: Herrschervolk in den Köpfen, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23 August 2022, p. 11.

rural poverty in China from the 1950s onwards. The latter contribution ties in not only with our special issue ›World – Hunger – Aid‹ (ZF 2/2021) but also with the special issue ›Social Inequality in State Socialism‹ (ZF 2/2013). No historian aspiring to currency and relevance in Germany or elsewhere can any longer afford to ignore or exoticise China.

The fact that *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* has, since its inception in 2003/04, been able to develop such a broad profile and understanding of the subject of contemporary history, along with its constant search for appealing and informative forms of printed and digital publication, is due to none more so than Konrad H. Jarausch, who co-founded this journal and has as editor faithfully nurtured and promoted it with wisdom and prudence. Our gratitude for this shared path, the professional and personal connection, will remain even though Konrad H. Jarausch has now taken his leave as co-editor.

Jan-Holger Kirsch for the editorial team
(Translated from the German by Joy Titheridge)