

75 years  
after WWII:

PEACE  
UNDER  
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TION?



## histoCON 2020

### 75 years after WWII: Peace under Construction?

6 – 9 May, 2020 at the EUREF-Campus in Berlin, Germany

The 8 May 2020 will mark the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe. In the Pacific, the Japanese Empire was to surrender on 9 or 12 September 1945. This global conflict was caused by the Third Reich with its racist and anti-Semitic imperial aspirations and by the megalomania of Japan. What distinguished this war from the First World War was its extreme violence, which resulted in a war of annihilation, especially in Eastern Europe. It cost between 55 and 70 million lives worldwide in the space of almost eight years. The end of the war in Europe in May 1945 caused the collapse of the Nazi regime and revealed the full extent of the Holocaust and its crimes against humanity to the world. But it also heralded a change in international relations and power structures. The memory of World War II as a global war of the 20<sup>th</sup> century continues to shape the German and European culture of remembrance to this day. The historical reappraisal of the war and its consequences is also an ongoing issue.

Although the war in Europe is understood to have been a global one, its history is usually presented mainly from a European or national perspective. For example, the war in the Pacific has barely found its way into representations of the war in Europe. In recent years, global historians have repeatedly pointed out that World War II began as early as 1937 with the Japanese invasion of China. It is necessary to introduce other perspectives into this representation to gain a differentiated understanding of what the end of the war meant around the world with a view to promoting a transnational exchange of views. According to the historical-political education approach, which sees remembrance as a prerequisite for understanding and actively shaping the present, it is necessary to reveal cross-connections, continuities and dependencies and thus to create thematic links to current developments and discourses.

#### Look back, think ahead

The Federal Agency for Civic Education/ bpb will be organising two linked events aimed at two different target groups between the 6 - 9 May, 2020 to commemorate the end of the war on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May. The plan is to invite 500 young people aged between 18 and 35 from around the world to learn about and discuss new perspectives.

*histoCON 2020* will combine two events at a single location (the EUREF-Campus in Berlin-Schöneberg), which are aimed at different young and international target groups.

The target group for **histoCON Laboratory** event are the newcomers: 250 young people between the ages of 18 and 25 who have had little or no contact with the events being commemorated beyond what they learned at school. The aim of *histoCON Laboratory* event is to reflect upon the significance of war and peace in both the past and the present. Innovative methods suitable for young people, and

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able to cater to different levels of knowledge within a diverse and heterogeneous target group, will focus on transcultural learning and civil engagement for peace and communication. The primary approach of the methods that will be applied is primarily a low-threshold one, i.e., the programme should make room for the accompanying discourse between conflicting narratives and create a safe, needs-based learning atmosphere.

**histoCON Campus** event is aimed at young professionals: 250 experienced young people between the ages of 25 and 35 with a background in historical education. In this context, the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the War provides an opportunity to reflect upon its significance for contemporary historical images and receptions, for historical education and for cultural projects. In addition to high-quality contributions from prominent individuals from the fields of science, education and culture, the programme will also include an interactive exchange of ideas about international project and networking opportunities for the participants, which may lead to new projects.

Both events will be brought together at central points (e.g. opening, closing, meeting with well-known representatives from the fields of politics and science). Value will also be placed on the transfer of knowledge between the two events with a view to linking the theory and practice of historical education. This also encompasses the opportunity for the young professionals of *histoCON Campus* event to act as content providers for selected programme points during *histoCON Laboratory* event.

The motto for the events will be "Look back, think ahead". The aim is to discuss narratives about World War II, its continuing effects and lessons that can be drawn from its history. The explicit intention is not only to commemorate World War II but also to consider the implications for the present and future. Participants will be invited to consider how the history of the war and its effects has been narrativized from immediately after its conclusion in 1945 to the present day, but also how it could be presented going forward. At the same time, the participants' own perspectives will be taken into account through key questions such as "what does World War II have to do with me?".

The participants will have the opportunity to spend several days considering these topics in a group of their international peers in workshops, panel discussions, lectures, open spaces, excursions, etc. They will also be invited to participate in and partially shape the German Federal Government's official commemoration ceremony on 8 May.

### Thematic focuses

We would welcome any suggestions pertaining to the various formats such as workshops, panel discussions, lectures, open spaces, excursions, etc. with a view to creating a varied programme that focuses on the following topics:

1. After the Holocaust



2. Global memories of war
3. Hopes for peace, liberty and human rights

We are also open to proposals concerning the accompanying cultural programme. Here, we are looking forward to submissions for the artistic and/or cultural exploration (e.g. readings, film screenings, concerts, theatre or art performances) of one or more of the focal points.

### **After the Holocaust**

Following the end of the Second World War, the full extent of the systematic murder of six million Jews in Europe was revealed to the global public. Three years later, the new state of Israel was founded, "which would open the gates of the homeland wide to every Jew and confer upon the Jewish people the status of a fully privileged member of the comity of nations" as the Declaration of Independence states. Due to its singularity, which distinguishes it from all other genocides and mass murders in history, there is always a certain amount of tension between the memory of the Holocaust and that of other groups victimised by the National Socialists.

The primary objective of this thematic focus is to discuss cultures of Holocaust remembrance and to reflect upon the responsibilities placed on us both today and in the future. It will also provide an opportunity to discuss the history and experiences of other victim groups in relation to the systematic murder of Jews (the Shoah) and to reflect on the term "Holocaust".

We are looking for suitable formats in which to address one or more of the following exemplary questions:

- What specific forms did survivor traumas take? How did they deal with these? How do these traumas affect future generations?
- What was already known about the Holocaust during the war?
- How was the guilt of the perpetrators dealt with (e.g. the Nuremberg Trials, Eichmann Trial, the escape of NS perpetrators to South America)?
- How can this guilt be adequately dealt with today (e.g. current trials in Germany against perpetrators, seminars for the descendants of the perpetrators, incipient moves to deal with the question of collaboration e.g. in the Netherlands etc.)?
- How is the Holocaust commemorated in different countries around the world? What forms could appropriate commemoration even take?
- How is remembrance likely to change given the fact there will soon be no more contemporary witnesses left?
- How should the current increase in anti-Semitism be reacted to?
- How did the two German states (Federal Republic of Germany and German Democratic Republic) come to terms with the past?
- What is the connection between the founding history of the State of Israel and the Holocaust?



- What role did information policy and the media play at the time and what is the current situation in the digital age?

### Global memories of war

The term “World War” is well chosen – various theatres of war encompassed the entire globe including Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, North- and South-America. All six continents were affected in different ways. Nevertheless, most people are only familiar with a small subset of events, namely those with the greatest relevance to their own respective countries, as it is those events that are communicated in schools and public spaces.

The purpose of this thematic focus is to emphasise the global significance of World War II. This will involve visiting specific places (e.g. monuments, places of particular importance for World War II, memorials etc.) as historical points of reference in the collective memories of various social groups. In addition, different cultures of remembrance will also be considered. This could be done with respect to commonalities and differences in experiencing, remembering and coming to terms with the history of the war as well as current references to it. Multi-perspectivity will be the central aspect of this focus so as to facilitate an understanding of World War II as a global war. Therefore, this focus will encompass transnational approaches, the concept of entangled history and places of the Second World War that have been "overlooked" in European or national narratives.

The event in Berlin will provide an opportunity to become familiar with numerous different perspectives from various countries. We are therefore looking for projects and proposals that address questions like the following:

- What is the significance of commemorating World War II in the respective country or region? How significant is World War II, for example, as compared with other commemorative occasions?
- What was life like in the occupied countries? What were the consequences of occupation in post-war life?
- How were experiences of extreme violence dealt with?
- What form of critical reappraisal has taken place over the past decades? Does the coming to terms with the past include particular gaps?
- Which historical-scientific insights have been gained about the development of the respective culture of remembrance?
- Which events (dates, locations) are commemorated?
- Which memorials are important and what do they reveal about contemporary society?
- What were the political and social consequences of the end of the War in different regions?
- Which (conflicting) narratives play a role in public discourses?



- Which figures play a central role in remembrance (heroes, soldiers, victims, perpetrators, displaced persons)?
- How is remembrance changing in today's migration society?
- Which iconic images occupy a place in collective memories?
- What narratives exist?
- Which traumas (e.g. involving forced labourers, "comfort women", soldiers) are described in the respective cultures of remembrance and how are they dealt with?
- Are there any findings about "forgotten memories"?
- What were the results of various reconciliation processes between groups on different sides and where were these never even initiated?
- What after-effects can still be observed to this day?
- What lessons have been learnt from the experience of World War II and how are these reflected today?
- What significance does World War II have for today's global power relations?

### Hopes for peace, liberty and human rights

Faced with between 55 to 70 million dead, immense human suffering and destruction of incomparable dimensions, the immediate post-war period was animated by the desire to build structures for more peace and cooperation. The founding of the UN and the (Universal) Declaration of Human Rights were based on the urge to create an organisation to secure peace and to protect people from state excesses in the future. Establishing the foundations for what was to become the EU was also driven by the desire to avoid future wars on the continent. Moreover, by fuelling aspirations for freedom and self-determination in the affected countries, the Second World War has also long been regarded as a catalyst for the worldwide wave of decolonisation that began after 1945. Nevertheless, many hopes associated with the end of the War were never realised. The emergence of human rights norms stagnated with the onset of the Cold War, and the massacre of Sétif in Algeria on 8 May, 1945 demonstrates that not everyone associates peace with this date.

This section focuses on questions about what became of these hopes, where successes have been achieved and where setbacks have occurred. Questions could be:

- Where has the UN been successful and where has it failed? What should the future of the UN look like?
- Has the world become more peaceful (with fewer wars), or are contemporary wars merely fought differently?
- How might future wars look like and how could they be prevented (e.g. climate wars)?
- What examples of peace-building measures are there? How can long-term peace be secured both by states and through civilian initiatives?

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- What is peace? What is peaceful coexistence?
- How can respect for human rights be guaranteed?
- What critical positions are there today with regard to human rights?
- What does Europe look like today? Is it still the peace project it originally started out as?
- Which of the former colonies' aspirations were realised after the end of the war and which were not?
- What role did the end of World War II play in the increasing process of decolonisation that then ensued?
- For whom did 8May bring peace, and for whom did it not?