

Dynamics of Mass Violence. A Dialogue on Syria and Cambodia

Round Table with Yassin al-Hajj Saleh and Timothy Williams, moderated by Thorsten Bonacker (ZfK) and Friederike Pannewick (CNMS)

Why does mass violence occur and how does one write about it? We want to discuss these questions in a dialogue between the cases of Syria and Cambodia. The war in Syria and the mass violence in Cambodia are separated by about forty years, but both raise the question of why people participate in torture, rape and murder and how conflicts can turn into civil war and genocide. At the same time people who write about and research such forms of extreme violence face the challenge of finding suitable forms and styles, in order to understand and explain the occurrence and dynamics of mass violence.

Born in 1961 in Raqqa, **Yassin al-Hajj Saleh**, is one of Syria's leading and most vocal writer and intellectual. As a writer and political dissident he spent 16 years in the prisons of the Assad regime (1980-1996). Al-Hajj Saleh is a founding member of *al-Jumhuriyya* group that thinks and writes about Syrian affairs since March 2012 (<http://aljumhuriya.net>). Once again pursued by the regime and radical Islamist militants for his revolutionary activity, he had to live in hiding from 2011-2013. In October 2013, Yassin al-Hajj Saleh went into exile in Turkey shortly before his wife Samira Khalil, a communist and revolutionary activist, was abducted along with their friend Razan Zeitouneh, a human rights defender, most likely by the Islamist group Jaish al-Islam. Yassin al-Hajj Saleh, however, has continued to write on political, social and cultural subjects relating to Syria and the Arab world for several Arab newspapers and journals outside Syria. In addition, he has authored and edited six books about Syria. Since 2017, he has been a fellow of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin. In 2012, he has been awarded the Prince Claus Award, a prize supported by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs that recognizes intellectuals who make an impact on their societies. He was awarded the Tucholsky Award by the Swedish chapter of the Pen Club in 2017.

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Timothy Williams is a postdoctoral research fellow at the Centre for Conflict Studies at Marburg University, Germany. Here he also concluded his PhD in 2017 and has since been acknowledged with two awards, one by the university of Marburg, the other by the German Peace Psychologist Association. His research deals with violence, focussing on its dynamics, particularly at the micro-level, as well as its consequences for post-conflict societies. He has conducted extensive field research in Cambodia, as well as Armenia and Rwanda and has been awarded the Emerging Scholar Prize of the International Association of Genocide Scholars in 2017. Timothy has published in *Intervention and Statebuilding*, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, *International Peacekeeping and Genocide Studies and Prevention*, among others, and has co-edited a volume on perpetrators (with Susanne Buckley-Zistel, 2018, Routledge).

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