

Zentrumstage 2020

(Re)thinking Time and Temporalities in Peace and Conflict

During the Zentrumstage 2020, around 180 participants reflected on how the conceptualization and integration of various aspects of time and temporalities shape our understanding of peace and conflict. The conference took place digitally from October 29-31. It contributed to deepening our understanding of these perspectives and created space for discussions on how the temporal focus in peace and conflict studies could be fundamentally strengthened.

The numerous contributions received in spring in response to our call for proposals enabled us to develop a diverse conference program. It consisted of ten panels, a total of 33 presentations which included two stimulating keynote speeches and a lively fishbowl discussion. We were particularly pleased with the high level of interest from scholars from different stages of their academic careers – both in terms of submissions and participation in the conference. The proportion of students, doctoral candidates, postdocs and professors participating was about one third each. The conference was met with international acclaim by people from different continents with a total of 20 different countries taking part in the debates on Time and Temporality in Peace and Conflict Studies. Susanne Buckley-Zistel, director of the Center for Conflict Studies, noted in her opening remarks that moving the conference into a digital space made it easier for more people from different contexts to access it. Despite fewer networking opportunities due to the virtual setting, many participants joined the digital break rooms and thematic forums provided for exchange.

Contributions from various fields of research included theoretical reflections on rethinking linear concepts as well as empirical work on conflicting multiple temporalities, timing and contexts and the temporalization of transition. The conference presented perspectives on political temporalities, the presence of violent pasts, the influence of temporalities in International Relations, and the role of temporal concepts in resistance and activism. Scholars conceptualized temporary elements in relation to peace practices and the connection of temporalities to memory carriers. Through the lively participation in the fishbowl discussion on generational conflicts and conflict generations, it became clear that temporal aspects are a connecting element of various research foci within Peace and Conflict research, which can contribute significantly to a better understanding of the field.

The conference was framed by two inspiring keynote speeches. In her opening lecture "Chronopolitics and temporal resistance in peace and conflict" Natascha Mueller-Hirth from Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen (Scotland) highlighted how temporality can become a form of governance. She showed that time itself can be understood as a form of power on a social level when it is examined critically. Time as such is not neutral; rather, it is simultaneously shaped by inequalities and in turn, time shapes inequalities. Annick Wibben from the Swedish Defence University in Stockholm closed the three-day conference with her lecture "Feminist Narratives of Peace & War: Conceptualizing Violence as Continua". She made a memorable appeal to think about violence across continuities and to address the many different forms of domination. Particularly striking was her description of the relevance of narratives in terms of their political and material consequences.

Overall, it became clear that the different ways in which we order conflict and peace over time affect our perceptions of the subject. Temporal dynamics within conflicts, such as acceleration or deceleration, the potential heterogeneity, and the interplay of timelines in different arenas at a given point in time provide valuable reference points for the consideration of processes in conflict situations. Furthermore, by considering processes as either finite or open, successful or failed, the construction of the past, present and future as well as the memory in and of a conflict can decisively contribute to the continuation, transformation or resurgence of conflict.

We would like to once again thank all those who contributed to the success of the conference by presenting their own research, chairing or moderating sessions, and participating in discussions and further conversations on various aspects of the conference topic. It was an inspiring, memorable experience. We would also like to thank the Center for Conflict Studies as well as the University Foundation of Marburg University and the MARburg University Research Academy (MARA) for their financial support.

The Zentrumstage are organized every two years by the Center for Conflict Studies and promote exchange on current scientific topics, which we consider a central part of our work.