

13. Berliner Colloquium zur Zeitgeschichte

Rereading Barbara Tuchman, *The Guns of August*

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(both from the Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung)

Conference language: German

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Questionnaire

Session 1 **Sleepwalking into the War?**

War Expectations and War Images in Prewar Europe

Introduction Christoph Nübel

Chair Bernd Greiner

- * Was the »militarization of thought« and of political culture a European-wide phenomenon? How sustainable and instructive is the notion of »militarization«? Can we speak of a transnational expectation or willingness to wage war?
- * Which war scenarios in Europe at that time proved to be particularly virulent? Who helped disseminate them, what means were used, and in what social and political milieus were they most widespread?
- * What influence did the military wield in society and politics in terms of its power of interpretation?
- * What were the interrelationships between military, politics and the public in the run-up to the war?

Session 2 **Conflict between the Great Powers, Alliance Mechanisms, Outbreak of Hostilities: Debate on the Causes and Occasion of the War**

Introduction Gerhard Hirschfeld

Chair Annika Mombauer

- * How susceptible to crisis and defensible in war were the interests and long-term goals of the great powers in terms of how they dealt with conflicts before 1914?
- * What precisely were the war aims of the most important protagonists? What was the relationship between these war aims and long-term strategic interests?

- * What was the role played by the military in politics in general and in diplomatic decision making processes in particular? Does it even make sense to draw a distinction between the military and politics or diplomacy?
- * Do categories such as group-think and stress-induced regression make for a better understanding of the crisis-management at the time?
- * What was the impact of symbolic aspects of the political maneuvering—honor, renown, credibility, recognition and prestige?
- * What can be said about politicians' scope of action not only during the July crisis but apart from it? What alternatives did they have at their disposal and who backed these options and when? Why weren't these alternatives employed?
- * To what extent can we speak of »systematic internal dynamics?«
- * What can be said about the »supporting actors« in the Balkans? In the run-up to the First World War was there a »wag-the-dog« scenario?
- * How important were the inner weaknesses and increasing destabilization of the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburg monarchy?
- * What interpretations of conflict, crisis and the outbreak of war have enjoyed popularity since the 1920s, and how can this popularity be explained?

Session 3 The Failed Search for the Decisive Battle, or How Does the History of Military Operations Enlighten Us?

Introduction Markus Pöhlmann

Chair Dierk Walter

- * How important was the Schlieffen plan for German war preparation and in escalation of the crisis during the events of July 1914? How important were the military plans of the other European powers?
- * Did the war plans have a disinhibiting effect on the respective military leaderships?
- * Did the possibility of a quick victory by way of a decisive battle ever exist?
- * To what degree was the »failure« of the operational plans responsible for the duration and course of the First World War? Or was the war's lengthiness unavoidable in view of the military reserves of Europe's great powers?
- * In what respect did operations in the First World War determine military thinking in the course of the twentieth century? Did it help to brutalize the Second World War?
- * Are operational questions still relevant for a modern understanding of the First World War?

* What are some of the other research perspectives that play an important role today?

Session 4 Why Unable to Stop? On the Dynamics of Total War

Introduction Christian Th. Müller

Chair Birthe Kundrus

- * How did the course of the war change the policies of the powers and the way they perceived their interests?
- * How serious were the various overtures for an armistice which were made starting in the fall of 1915?
- * Why did these attempts fail? Did they ever have a chance for success?
- * What factors restricted the freedom of movement of the political and military protagonists?
- * Can we speak of a radicalized internal dynamic of »total war«?
- * In the course of the war, what political and military decision making elites increasingly came to the fore, and which ones were shunted to the background?
- * What was the role played by social upheavals spawned by the war as well as by domestic-political impulses and concerns?
- * What was the relationship between the »emotionalization of politics« and the population's increasing war-weariness?
- * How was the First World War's inability to stop different or similar to other wars?

Suggested Reading

August 1914 (book review). In: Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik. 10(1965),10; 882f.

Der erste Unheilsmonat 1914. In: Die Zeit. 24. Juli 1964; 6

Wolfgang J. Mommsen, Der Topos vom unvermeidlichen Krieg. In: Jost Dülffer, Karl Holl (Hg.): Bereit zum Krieg. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 198; 194-224

Barbara Tuchman, August 1914. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 2013; 28-30, 36-41, 55-69, 579-98, 100-103, 106-109, 130-133, 327-349, 457-462